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THE OUTLAW

SAGAS RETOLD

A LOVER'S TALE (Kormak)

FREY AND HIS WIFE (Ogmund Dint)

THORGILS (Thorgisl)

GUDRID THE FAIR (Wineland)

THE OUTLAW (Gisli)

In Preparation

THE LIGHT HEART (Thormod)

Jan 8'2

THE OUTLAW

BY

MAURICE HEWLETT
AUTHOR OF "THE FOREST LOVERS," ETC.

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DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1920

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PREFATORY NOTE

TEXT in *Origines Icelandicæ,* Vol. II. Sir George Dasent published a literal translation in 1865. In 1900 Miss Beatrice Barmby made and published a dramatic version of it (Constable & Co., 1900), with a preface by Professor York Powell. My volume is made on the lines of its predecessors. I have added nothing to the substance and have left out many of the accidents, including (without exception) all the bad verses.

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THE OUTLAW

THE OUTLAW

I

THE CURSE ON THE BLADE

IN after days, when men told each other the tale which I am about telling to you, much was made of the curse set upon a spear called Grayflanks, and a good deal of nonsense, with some sound sense, talked about it. In those days, when there were fewer things of handling than there are now, and a sword or spear, if it were a good one, had a character which was known and valued, it would seem that a personal life might very well abide in the thing, so that you could not only instruct it in its course of conduct, but could look back upon it and say: "Well, such or such a deed was to be expected of such or such a thing." There is much to be said both for and against that way of looking at things; but I am not prepared at the moment to argue

it out. A serious poet and friend of mine is fond of imputing character to his domestic furniture. He makes allowances for its drawbacks, treats it with a respect which is pleasant to see and very pleasant to read about in his verses. The odds, I believe, are very much on the side of his being right. If this tale should happen under his eye, it will confirm him in the respect he has for his kettle and chest of drawers, as it has already confirmed me.

Grayflanks was not a spear when the curse was laid, which was long ago when Hakon the Good was King of Norway; in those days it was a sword, and in the secret keeping of a man named Kol, who was a thrall. But Kol had not always been a thrall. He was well-born and had been something of a great man in his own country, before he had the misfortune to engage in warfare with greater men than he, and to lose everything he had, except his sword.

There was one other thing which he did not lose—his character. With that, which was of a strong, very honest and resolute man, he impressed himself upon his possessor, Ise, a man

of high degree in North Moeren; so much so that he was made foster-father of his master's daughter Ingibiorg, a very handsome girl. She grew up to love him more than her own father, and when she married, which she did as soon as she was marriageable, she took Kol with her, gave him his freedom, and settled him and his sword in a housestead belonging to her husband in Surnadale.

Her husband was a young man called Ari, the eldest of the three sons of Thorkel Goldhelm. The other sons were Gisli and Thorbiorn. Thorkel Goldhelm was rich and a great proprietor. Seeing that Ingibiorg brought a fine dowry with her, he dealt handsomely with the young couple, set them up in a good house and lands and looked to see them prosper. And so they did for a year or more.

Then troubles began, not of their own seeking. There was a stalwart ruffian settled in that part of the country, a fighting man who had a company of cut-throats at his beck. His name was Biorn, and he was called Biorn Black, because he was of that colour and sort. He

was said to deal in magic, to be invulnerable and I don't know what not; but the facts were that he was very ready with his weapons, entirely ruthless, and had a mighty appetite for the good things of life and strong disinclination to work for them. No pretty woman was safe from him. He regarded her as lawful plunder. Whether she was gentle or simple, married or maid, she was his for a time. He took her away, kept her as long as he pleased, then sent her back. This outrageous conduct, while it was successful, established two things —a great dread of him, which made his depredations more easy, and a great reputation for for him, which almost made them a necessity. If he had continued a little longer, he might have set up a *droit de seigneur;* but he tried it once too often, and happened to meet his match.

He left Ari and Ingibiorg alone for about a twelvemonth; then went up to the house in force, knocked at the door with a spear-butt and demanded entertainment. By a lucky providence the house was not empty. Besides Ari

and his wife there were his two brothers, Gisli and Thorbiorn, there; there was Kol the freedman, and certain other men, servants of the house. The Baresark had six of his cut-throats with him, but no more.

Ingibiorg served them with drink, and Biorn Black toasted her with effrontery. "To our next meeting, mistress," he said, "in a snugger place than this." She flamed, and left the hall. Ari asked what he meant by insulting the lady of the house. Biorn Black explained himself. "Custom of the country, dear sir," he said. "I claim the rights of a lord of the land so long as I can wield them. Your lady is no worse off than any other man's lady—and I dare avouch she will be the better. As for you, there can be no doubt you will do wisely if you let me have my way."

Ari said, "Explain yourself"; and Biorn did so. "The fact is," he concluded, "I am something of a tyrant, but an easy one where I am met with civility and reason. When you and I have got exact measurement of each other, I dare swear we shall be good friends enough."

"It may be that we shall," Ari said, his colour high. "Therefore the sooner we take measurements the better."

"Oh," said Biorn, "that is how you take it, is it? I am not to be master here without a fight. Is that it?

"Certainly it is," said Ari. Biorn finished his horn, and set it down with a bang.

"Then I will fight you for Ingibiorg and your gear," he said. "We will meet on the holm, and settle it."

"As soon as you please."

"I make the same conditions with you as with anybody else. I have but one code in these affairs. We fight to a finish. The goods of the vanquished fall to the victor. Does that suit you?"

"I will make it do so," said Ari. So they parted for the time.

They met on the holm at the time appointed; they fought, and Ari was killed. No blow of his touched Biorn, so far as could be seen. He was hardly breathed, took it all as a matter of course. When it was over, and all the men

there gathered about the dead, Biorn said, wiping his sword, "Now I have house and lands and a fair woman into the bargain." But Gisli, brother of the dead man, said, "Not quite so fast. If you think that our blood is so soon staunched, you are likely to be made a fool of. You will fight me before you lay hands on anything of my brother's. You will fight me tomorrow."

"So I will," said Biorn, "and your brother Thorbiorn the next day, and your father Thorkel the next—and so on, so far as your kindred goes. I will never deny a man a fair fight."

Gisli went home to his brother's house and saw Ingibiorg. She surprised him; for when they had laid out her young husband and provided for his burial, she seemed quite composed and mistress of herself.

The mourners departed, all but Gisli, who stayed on. He and Ingibiorg sat together in a window-seat and looked out over the river to the hill which was settling down purple into the dusk.

Presently Ingibiorg said, "And what now for me?"

"You have friends and well-wishers," Gisli said. "One of them will prove it tomorrow."

She looked sharply up. "Is that yourself?"

"It is," he said.

"What would you do for me?"

"I have challenged that black devil to fight tomorrow morning," said he.

She raised her fine brows. "I fear for you. He is too strong—without you get help."

"Help me, my dear, if you can," he said. "I need it. I know how strong he is. Poor Ari never touched him."

She coloured a little, and her eyes showed her feeling. "I would help you, my dear, with all I have. What is more, I believe that I can."

"How so?" he asked.

She said, "I know the man for you. Kol, my foster-father, has a sword by him, which was forged in his own country. He won't say much about it, but I know that he will not part with it for long. He believes it can never fail."

"He shall lend me that sword," Gisli said.

Ingibiorg sent for Kol to come up to the house. Gisli greeted him and said he had been told of a sword which he had.

"Yes," Kol said, he had a sword. "Nothing wonderful, perhaps; but a good sword enough."

Then Gisli said that he was to fight Biorn Black the next day, and would Kol lend him the sword? Kol said that he might.

"You are not very willing, friend?"

"Why, no," Kol said. "It will happen to me as it always does when a man lends a handy thing. You won't want to give it back to me again."

"Oh," said Gisli, "but I will assuredly give it back."

Kol said, "Wait a bit. That sword of mine will bite through any metal—steel or iron or bronze. No spell can dull the edge of it, and no hard usage save one. The Dwarfs forged it underground, as they tell me. It served my grandfather and my father, and has served me. I said that no hard usage would foil it save one. I don't believe it would turn against myself.

On the contrary, I think it would fight my quarrel though we were on opposite sides in the field. Now if I lend you Grayflanks, and it serves you well, you will desire to keep it. That's how it will be. Know this, then, that I shall take it ill—and so will the sword."

Gisli vowed that he would do no such thing; and Kol brought him the sword—a thin fine blade, two-edged, as sharp as a razor.

The meeting took place as arranged. Both sides brought to it all the hands they could muster; so there were the elements of a battle held, as it were, in solution.

When Gisli and Biorn faced each other, Gisli offered his enemy the first blow. Biorn took it, saying that it was the first time he had been offered that. "First blow, with me," he said "is mostly the last blow—but as you please."

Gisli dressed his shield and awaited him. The blow fell, a smashing slice aimed for the top rim; but Gisli had been ready for it, and lifted his shield in time to save his head. The sword fell below the handle, but cut away the whole of the lower part. Biorn said he was

a livelier customer than his brother. He was perfectly good-tempered through it all.

Now it was Gisli's turn. He aimed, not at the top of the shield, but at the tail of it. Grayflanks went clean through it with ease, and went further; for it went through Biorn's leg below the knee, and dropped him like an ox. Young Gisli sprang after him and cut off his head with a second blow; and that was the end of the ruffian Biorn Black, whose men stampeded and were pursued by the triumphing Surnadalemen.

It was a great home-coming for Gisli, and Ingibiorg's looks betrayed her. She could not conceal, or she made no attempt to conceal, her pride in him, as she kissed him welcome. "Why, sweetheart," he said, "the way is as much yours as mine. It was from you I had this good sword."

She clung to him. "And glad I am, and proud I am."

"The pity is that you did not give it to poor Ari," he said. He could hardly hear her answer, "I had rather you had had it."

That made his heart beat. "Now you must tell me how that may be."

She was bold. "Because I always loved you better."

He kissed her. "My dear, he sha'n't grudge you me now."

So he married Ingibiorg and took over land and goods; and so happy were they in each other that it never entered his head to give back his sword to Kol. Far from that, he always had Grayflanks with him, and kept it under his bedding at night.

Kol went about his business in his ordinary quiet and steadfast maner; but his eye was never off his sword, though he said nothing about it either to Gisli or to Ingibiorg. That went on for a year, perhaps—long enough, at any rate, to get the right to the sword rooted in Gisli's head. When at last Kol did speak, he was very much taken aback.

They met in the woods where Kol had been felling timber. He was on his way home, ax in hand, when he met Gisli afoot. He had Grayflanks in his hand at the time, and stood, talking

pleasantly about indifferent matters. Presently, however, Kol said, "That sword now—he has served you well?"

"None ever served man better," said Gisli. "It has given me everything I could have hoped for in this life. It is a wonder-sword. There is no fellow to it."

"Ah," said Kol. "Then you won't be surprised if I ask you for it back again."

But Gisli *was* surprised; more than that, he knew very well that he couldn't possibly part with it.

"Don't ask me that," he said. "You shall sell me the sword."

Kol shook his head. "Nay, I'll not sell him."

"But you shall name your price. Money, stock, land—name your price."

Again Kol shook his head. "I want no money, land or stock more than I have of your lady's gift. I am too old to try for what I once was. I am a freeman, and get my own living. I have very few things of my own, but what I have I value. That sword is what I value most of all."

Gisli looked about him. He was much troubled, and showed his trouble. He was as sorry for Kol as he could be; but he must keep his word.

"I can't give it you back, Kol," he said, "and that is the truth."

"I knew that from the first," Kol said. "I told you that when I lent him to you. But I ask you now to deal honestly with me as you swore that you would."

"I am doing you a wrong," said Gisli, "I know that very well. There will be trouble to both of us—bad trouble. But while I live no man shall wield this sword but me."

They looked at each older. The older man's brow was very dark; but the younger man was red all over his face, and there was shame in his eyes. They may have looked at each other for a full minute; but hatred grew in that time, and quite suddenly they began fighting. They slipped in and out of the trees, Kol pushing forward, Gisli avoiding him. Presently Gisli was brought up by a tree, changed his tactics, made a rush forward and aimed a downward cut at

Kol's head. The sword did not bite, true to his master's faith in him; but it broke in two pieces and smashed in the skull. At that moment, when Kol fell, Gisli fell also, dead as a stone of a blow from the ax. Kol had the strength to pull his broken sword towards him. "This is the beginning of ill-luck," he said. They found the broken pieces clutched in his hand, but took them from him. Thorbiorn, the last of the three brothers, took them home, and gave them to his son, Gisli the second, before he died. If he had heard Kol's last words he would hardly have done that.

II

GISLI SOURSSON

THE tale begins truly with this Gisli the Second, who was a son of the last of the three brothers, Thorbiorn, afterwards called Thorbiorn Sour, for a reason which will be found in its place. Thorbiorn succeeded his father, Thorkel Goldhelm, in the lands of Stock, married a wife called Thora, and settled down to what looked like being a peaceful and prosperous life. And so it was until the children grew up, and while the curse upon the blade slept. Thorbiorn and Thora had four children, of whom the eldest was a girl, Thordis. The three others were boys, and as they came into the world he had them called after his own people, the first of them Thorkel, after his father; the second Gisli, the third Ari, after his two dead brothers. By the time that Ari, the last child, came both he and his wife were looking to be done with sowing children, and

were rather for sitting down to enjoy the harvest of them. Thordis was twelve years old, Thorkel was ten, Gisli nine, when this last one cropped up; and Thora declared that she could not thole him. So he was sent away to her own people at Frithey, and fostered there. No more is to be seen of him until near the end of the tale. But the other three lived on at Stock and grew to be a fine young woman and two fine young men.

At the time this tale begins Thordis, the girl, was twenty years old, tall, fair and handsome in a bold and trenchant way. She could ride as well as a man, and hold her own in talk with anybody—or so she believed. Thorkel her brother, of eighteen years, was very much like her, but of a softer texture. He was very handsome and very idle; was said to be of great strength; but no one knew that for certain because he seldom exerted himself. Women took much notice of him, and he had a fine gift of conversation, which made him popular with young men. He always wore good clothes, and had a core of vanity in him which was much

more tender than he suspected. With all that, he had a tender heart too; but there again, he had no notion of it.

With that fine pair the powers of Thorbiorn and Thora seemed to have contented themselves, for Gisli, the second son, and third child, was of a different stamp. He was as tall as the other two, and fully as strong; but he lacked their good looks, their grace, and their affability. He was quiet, shy, what we call a dark horse. And though he had a square brow, and a pair of steady grey eyes, he was plain. Not the sort of young man you would look at twice in a mixed company. His hair and beard were golden-brown, his skin was dark; there looked to be a kind of dust upon him, a kind of haze which made him indistinct, negligible. And yet he was for ever at work—building, smithying, quarrying, timber-felling. At this time of his life—a year younger than Thorkel—he was answerable for most of the business at Stock. He had just built a fine storehouse beyond the hall with some of the most ingenious panelling-work you ever saw. Outside there was noth-

ing to be seen; the planks lapped over each other and were dowelled into the timbers in the ordinary way. But inside there was a false casing which could be removed; and then you saw that every plank of the outer wall was held in place by iron bolts, which could be unscrewed from the inside. Nobody knew anything of it, for nobody had taken the trouble to look into it. Gisli had done it all by himself, taking infinite delight in it for its own sake, with infinite chuckles as he did it. Very handy it afterwards proved to be—yet even then he asked no credit for his ingenuity, and of course got none.

As for his temper, it seemed perfect. They all thought him the mildest of men; and his father, who certainly was nothing of the sort, was apt to be sarcastic about it. It was odd that Thorkel, who never did anything, should have been supposed to be ready for anything, while Gisli, who was always doing something, should have been thought capable of nothing. It shows what a fine presence and ready address will do for a man.

It must have been just about this time, with Thordis in the flower of her age, when the visits to Stock of a young man called Kolbiorn began to give offence. There were indeed two young men in particular who came to talk with Thordis; this Kolbiorn was one, and Bard was another. They were both friends of Thorkel's and very much of his stamp. So long as they came together, and all played together, nobody cared; but when presently Kolbiorn took to coming alone, and then getting Thordis to be alone with him—why, then, people began to talk, and Thora spoke to her husband about it.

According to the customs of those days in that country there was no more deadly thing for a girl's name than that it should be bandied about from hallstead to hallstead, and nothing more certain to set it flying than that a young man should come to talk with her without first seriously talking to her parents. In short, it was a girl's business to marry and get children, and not to have love-affairs. Love, they thought, might follow marriage, but in no case should precede it. As for love-mak-

ing as a mere delight and pastime that was called beguiling a girl, and held for a grave insult to her family. Now it seemed to Thorbiorn and Thora that Kolbiorn was beguiling Thordis.

Thorbiorn grew angry and began to grumble. He did not speak to his eldest son, because it was an accepted thing in that family that it was simpler to scorn Gisli for not doing Thorkel's work as well as his own than to try to get Thorkel to do anything at all. Thorkel, it was supposed, had full rights as well as full powers, and one of his rights was, to be let alone. But Gisli had no rights at all. In the present trouble Thorkel (except for his rights) was his father's man—a friend of Kolbiorn's and much more in his company than Gisli was. But it was to Gisli he made his complaints, and bitterly.

"Here is a pleasant state of things—my household becoming the common talk of the dale, and my sons looking on, with not a word to say! Do you wish your sister's name in the dust—tumbled about like a windfall apple?"

Gisli looked up from his wheel where he was busy with his chisels. "You mean Kolbiorn, I suppose? I don't think that he means any harm. A word or two will put that right."

Thorbiorn snorted. "Your words! A man would find something sharper than words."

Gisli replied, "I daresay he would. But I don't see any need to quarrel about a thing like that."

"If you don't intend to stop scandal-mongering at our expense," said Thorbiorn, "it seems that I am to be disgraced in my sons as well as daughter."

"I will speak to Kolbiorn," Gisli said. "Don't upset yourself about it."

Thorbiorn fumed. "I hear you at it. You beg him to be so good as leave us alone. We have never done him any harm. And then—'I thank you, Kolbiorn, for your generosity in ceasing to insult my sister. It was handsomely done. My father is greatly in your debt.' That will have a fine sound in my ear when I have it from a neighbour, as be sure I shall."

"Ah," says Gisli, "you don't understand, fa-

ther." Old Thorbiorn stamped away, while Gisli span his wheel round.

He said nothing to his brother, nothing to his sister. The first would have refused help, the other would have scorned him. Things had so shaped themselves that the cares of the house were on his young shoulders. He did not himself feel angry with Kolbiorn, who seemed to him a nobody in particular. Young men liked whispering to girls, and girls liked being whispered to—or so it seemed. But so far as he had noticed anything Thorkel was as often as not with the pair of them; and if Thorkel saw nothing amiss, neither did he. It was tiresome, because there were many things he had to do, important things and interesting things.

But he collected himself for his task, and the very next time Kolbiorn paid a visit to Stock he made it his business to be about the house toward the end of the day. When Kolbiorn finally came out of the house, there was Gisli waiting for him.

"A fine night," says Kolbiorn—and it was, being high summer-time.

"Very fine," said Gisli, "and I am minded to go a part of your way with you."

They struck down the hillside to the river, and upstream toward the head of the dale where Kolbiorn must ford the water.

For a time they walked in silence. Gisli was never one for much speaking, and Kolbiorn, who didn't care about him, had nothing to say to him. So when Gisli did begin to talk it sounded harsh and abrupt, and as if he were making much ado about nothing.

"See here, Kolbiorn," he said, "we can't have you visiting at Stock so often as you do. Few words are best. We cannot have it."

"What do you mean? I don't understand that at all," said Kolbiorn, who understood perfectly well.

"My father has grown very angry about your coming, and being with my sister so much. People tell him that you are beguiling her—and he is in a great taking about it."

Kolbiorn worked himself into a heat. "I think you are taking a liberty—I must say so. I am lonely at home, as you know. I thought I

was among friends, but it seems that one of you at least is not friendly."

"If you mean me, you are wrong. I am always friendly," said Gisli. "I will see as much of you as you please, and be glad of it. So will Thorkel, as you know."

"Why has Thorkel said nothing of this to me?" cried Kolbiorn.

"It is enough for one of us to say it," Gisli said. "And I hope enough has been said."

"More than enough," said Kolbiorn. "It is a hateful fix to put me in. Your father's suspicions on one side—my own feelings on the other—I don't know what to do." Gisli remained bland but immovable.

"Well, I have done what I could," he said. "Having gone so far, you may be sure that I shall side with my father if this goes on. But I hope it will not. I have spoken for the best, hoping to put an end to the thing before it goes too far. But I tell you fairly, if it goes any further, it will have to go much further."

"What do you mean?" said Kolbiorn.

"Just that," said Gisli. And then they parted.

He said nothing to anybody when he reached home, and was asked no questions; but it is a true fact that Kolbiorn came much less to Stock for a while. In fact, he didn't come at all until Yule; and then, when there was feasting at the house, he did come, being asked by Thorkel. He behaved himself well, and stayed a few days. After that, the temptations were too many for him. He came one morning and saw Thordis; he came again and saw her again; then it was an affair of every day, and old Thorbiorn worked himself into a frenzy. Why he didn't speak to the young man himself, it is difficult to see. My own notion is that he wanted to ease himself upon Gisli, to use the patient lad as a boar uses a post, to rub his tusk upon. That is what he did—to gird at Gisli in a way hard to bear.

They had all been in the hall that early winter evening—old Thorbiorn tossing his foot up and down by the fire; Gisli working at a little forge he had, blowing up the coals or hammer-

ing away at his bolts; the three idlers on the cross-bench, Thordis in the middle, Thorkel on one side of her, Kolbiorn on the other, talking lightly, making jokes which nobody understood but themselves, and laughing the more readily because they set themselves thereby still further apart from the rest. It was hard to bear if you once began to think about it, and so Thorbiorn found it. But Gisli was busy and thought of other things.

By and by, when the old man saw nothing but bright red in front of him, the three graceless ones went out on some business of their own, and Thorbiorn turned and lashed Gisli with his tongue.

"This is the end of your girl's work, your begging and praying! Are you a son of mine or a daughter? By the name of you I must have thought you a boy when you were born. But I remember my brother whose name you bear, and am confounded. Lucky for him that he never grew old, to see my sons fit themselves for petticoats. And lucky for me too, I daresay."

Gisli's dark face grew darker. He looked reproach. "You put more upon me than you need, I think. I don't know why I am to put right all the wrongs in this house. A word from you would have done all that was needed."

"In my young days," said Thorbiorn, "we did not use so many words as you do. We had another way. But I'll ask no more of you, since I see that your heart is not equal to it."

"I wish you could let my heart alone," said Gisli, and went out of the hall. His forge hammer was in his hand.

Just outside the door were the three partners in disgrace. Kolbiorn had Thordis' hand. He was taking leave of her. Thorkel with a cloak over head and shoulders was waiting for him. They seemed very easy and full of their own affairs. That was the first time Gisli ever knew what anger was. What enraged him was that they, who had put themselves in the wrong, were much better off than he was. There was injustice in it, the thing of all things which he could not put up with.

"Are you for going home?" said Gisli, very quietly.

Kolbiorn stretched himself. "Well, I think I will be trotting. Thorkel, do you come as far as the ford with me?"

"Well, I will," said Thorkel.

"So will I," Gisli said. Kolbiorn looked at him—then at Thorkel with a lifted eyebrow. Gisli felt the isolation keenly; but he was past that discomfort. Thorkel took no notice.

They went down the hill in silence, Kolbiorn whistling. It was not dark, as the sky was bright with stars, and the snow threw up strongly. It was deep snow, too; but by the river it was all beaten down.

"I've made a path for you," said Kolbiorn with a laugh.

"Indeed you have," said Gisli, "and I wish you had not. You have forgotten what we talked of in the summer on this road."

"It was better forgotten," said Kolbiorn.

"But I haven't forgotten," Gisli said, "nor my father either. Now there must be an end of it all."

Thorkel said nothing. He was walking in front, folded in his cloak, for the night was bitter cold. He showed plainly that the quarrel was no business of his.

Kolbiorn said, "I don't see how that is to be."

Gisli said, "But I do. Either you stop visiting us, or——"

"Well?" said Kolbiorn.

"Or," said Gisli, "we stop you."

The pair of them stopped at that, and looked at each other. Thorkel, at a little distance, stood watching them.

"Who stops me?" said Kolbiorn.

"I do." Kolbiorn shrugged his shoulders. "As you please. You may try."

Gisli then said, "Do you undertake to keep away?"

"I do not," said Kolbiorn. Gisli's blood boiled over. His hammer was in his hand. He whirled it about and struck Kolbiorn on the temple. He fell sideways, and lay with his head over the river-bank. When they lifted him he was dead.

Thorkel was the more upset of the two of them. He would not speak to his brother; nor would he go home. Gisli, in an agony of regret for the days when he and Thorkel were happy together—days which he felt could never come again—would have done anything in the world to appease his brother, even though he still had the sense of injustice clearly before him. Monstrous it was that he should have to uphold the family honour, and Thorkel need to be courted! Yet he did court him—to no purpose.

"My father could not have Thordis beguiled. You see how it was. I asked him to stop coming—you heard him refuse." So he stammered excuses which ought not to have been asked for. All to no purpose. Thorkel would not look at him. "It was hateful—he was my friend—" was all he had to say before he set off at a great rate up the river away from Stock.

Gisli did what was needed to the dead man; covered him in his cloak, laid the hammer beside him and went heavily home.

He found his father in the hall, who asked

him, "Well, how have your petitions been heard this time?"

"They have been heard, father."

"Humph!" said Thorbiorn. "Explain yourself!"

"Kolbiorn won't plague you any more."

The light shone in Thorbiorn's eyes. "Then he's dead."

"He's dead," said Gisli, and turned away, sick at heart.

III

THE FEUD

THORKEL did not come home that night, nor the next day. That made Gisli feel as if he had killed him rather than Kolbiorn. Thordis pretended to be perfectly indifferent about Kolbiorn's killing and Thorkel's absence; but she could not bring herself to be civil to Gisli. His father, on the other hand, was cordial, and treated him with a new kind of respect.

After some days Thorkel was heard of. He was on Saxa Island, staying in the house of a man known as Fighting Skeggi, a kinsman of Kolbiorn's. It was supposed by that that he had ranged himself as his brother Gisli's enemy; the reports went so far as to say that he would have had Skeggi take the field on the part of his cousin; but old Thorbiorn laughed at that. He said to Gisli, "Your brother seems

woman-hearted, but I don't believe he is a fool. He will come back to his place by the fire, you will see. Old as I am, he knows I am a match for a dozen like him. And as for you, he has found out what you can do." In the meantime, Bard, who had been Kolbiorn's close friend in the old days, now came up to Stock on his own account, and after a little while told Gisli that he intended to propose himself for Thordis. "What do you think of that?" he asked him with a rather bleak grin. Gisli did not think much of it, but said that he should have no voice in the matter. Bard made himself very pleasant, and was often at Stock, but never unless Gisli or the old man were present. Thordis was friendly, but no more. She had forgotten her resentment with Gisli, if she had ever had one. Nobody really knew what Thordis thought or felt. She had a bold way with her, and showed herself indifferent to good or ill fortune alike—out of bravado, it was thought. At any rate she kept her head very high, squared her shoulders, and walked the world as if she did not belong to it, but rather

as if the whole span of it was subject to herself.

Then finally, and after a long interval, Thorkel came up to Stock, with Skeggi and Skeggi's men, all on horseback—some twenty of them, it may be. Gisli received them at the door, and brought them into the hall. Old Thorbiorn's shaggy brows were knit as he stood up to face them. He was dry with his handsome son. "So you have remembered that you were born and bred here, have you? Somebody has told you that you have a father, brother and sister living. They have heard tell of you too; but in such words as made it hard to believe."

Thorkel took the rebuke pleasantly, with an easy smile. "They shall learn the truth about me," he said. "It does not do to believe everything you hear."

They were well entertained, and the evening passed over without discord until Thorkel, after supper, broached the reason of the visit in force. After laying stress upon the killing of Kolbiorn, for which he blamed Gisli's hot tem-

per, and was not gainsaid by old Throbiorn, he next went on to point out what he called a way of "composing the feud." Thorbiorn snorted at the word.

"Feud!" he said, "it takes two to make a feud. I see nobody with a good word for that worthless loon who has been slain."

Here Skeggi grew rather red in the face, and said that his kinsman was highly connected by "those who cannot see such an indignity pass unatoned. But I have come with a fair offer, Thorbiorn, which seems to me hopeful." Then he opened his mind, which was set upon the possession of Thordis. Directly Thorbiorn understood what he was after, he flatly refused him, giving no reason but that he had other plans in his head.

"It won't suit us here at all," he said, "and I hope you will take that for an answer."

Skeggi said it was very strange "after what had happened." Thorbiorn replied that "strange" was exactly what it was not. Skeggi said, that was not the end of it; and Thorbiorn, that it was, so far as he was concerned; and

after that there was nothing for it but to go away.

Thorkel went off with them, without having passed a single word with Gisli.

In talking it over, Thorkel and Skeggi concluded that Bard was at the bottom of it, and Skeggi determined that he would show his mettle upon Bard's body. Bard was a strongly-made man, red-haired and small in the eye. He received the challenge to fight on Saxa Island, and accepted it at once; but he rode off to Stock directly the challengers had gone and told Gisli all about it.

"Well," said Gisli, "what is all that to do with me?" Bard stared at him.

"Why," he said, "I hoped, naturally, that you would back me up in it. He's a famous fighter, is Skeggi."

Gisli wanted to be let alone, but did not see how to refuse. He gave his promise, and went on with what he was working at.

A week went by and he heard no more from Bard; and then one day he met him in the wood below his house. "When do you meet Skeggi,

Bard?" he asks. Bard looked very glum.

"See here," he said. "I hope you understand why I am called upon, and why I answered as I did."

Gisli said, "I suppose Skeggi thought you stood in his way with Thordis. Was that it?"

"Yes," said Bard. "That was it. Well, my question to you now is, Do I stand in his way or not?"

"I can't answer you," said Gisli. "I don't know anything about my father's wishes for Thordis. You had better settle with him afterwards."

"I had rather settle it first," Bard said; and then, when Gisli made no reply to that, he said in another kind of voice, "It is a fact that I have no wish to fight with Skeggi."

Gisli looked squarely at him. "Do you mean that you will not?"

"Yes," said Bard. "I have been thinking it over. I shall not go to Saxa."

Gisli did not understand him. "You are afraid of him?" Bard shrugged. "You *are* afraid of him. I never knew that men feared

each other, and said so. You are a miserable wretch who will put us all to shame. It means that I must go myself. The second time that I have had another man's quarrel thrust on me." Bard walked slowly away up the hill to his house.

Gisli said nothing about this affair at home, lest there should be a fuss made. His father had a greater love of fighting than he had himself. To him it was a nuisance, a thing to be got over as soon as might be. He was not a born fighter—far from it; but, to his mind, when you had got yourself into a corner you must get yourself out again; and it made no difference whether the cornering of you had been done by yourself or another. There you were. When the day came on he told some of the hinds that he should want them to ride with him to Saxa, and was up, armed and away before his father was out of bed.

It was a long ride and he was somewhat late at the ferry. By the time he had his ten men over and mounted again, Skeggi was fuming; by the time they entered the little wood which

separated the holm-gang from the shore, Skeggi was railing at cowards and cravens. Soon Gisli caught sight of him, a fine figure in bright mail, with his famous sword Warflame in his hand. Then Skeggi saw him, and called out, "Where is your champion, Gisli?"

Gisli said, "He is here."

"Are you for doing Bard's work?"

"I am for doing what comes in my way."

"And taking it too?"

"That's of course."

"Our friend Bard," said Skeggi, "knows what is good for him."

"That's to be seen," said Gisli.

Gisli had a battle-ax to face Warflame, and a long shield of his own devising. It had a rim of steel, and steel ribs welded into a steel backbone. They faced each other in the lists, and Skeggi, who was very limber and excitable, leapt about, hewing at Gisli and singing as he slashed at him the praises of Warflame. But Warflame rang upon the shield in vain.

Gisli bided his time, but after a heavy blow from Skeggi, which missed him altogether and

nearly brought his assailant on to his nose, he slashed at his shield with the heavy ax, and cut clean through the lower part of it, and clean through Skeggi's left leg. That ended the battle. Skeggi's friends had to ransom him out of the lists, and then he was carried off to his house. Thorkel stayed behind and seemed wishful to speak to his brother.

Gisli made it easy for him. "Don't you go with your friend?" he asked.

Thorkel said, "You have done very valiantly, taking on Bard's quarrel."

"It had to be done," Gisli said. "Our name was involved in the matter on account of our handsome sister. It was for her sake that I quarrelled with Kolbiorn; but I don't mind telling you now that I did not intend his death."

Thorkel said, "Well, that is done; and now it seems to me that we must band ourselves together against Skeggi's kindred. I shall certainly go home now with you. I believe our father will be glad to have me there, sooner or later."

Gisli laughed. "You may be sure of it. He thinks a great deal of you."

So the brothers went home together, and were well received. All Surnadale thought highly of Gisli for his feats—yet the odd thing was that Thorkel, who had done nothing, had his share in all his brother's consideration—for no better reason, as it appeared, than that he had come back.

Skeggi had gone near losing his life as well as his leg; but he was tough, and did not lose it. He was a middle-aged man, a widower, with fine sons of his own who now took the quarrel upon themselves, and cried up a feud against Surnadale all over their country. Einar and Arne were the names of Skeggi's sons; and they it was who drove the house of Stock out of Norway.

IV

FIRE

THOSE two young men laid their plans well and silently, for the blow came upon Stock on a winter's night, as little expected as a clap of thunder. They had gathered a band of men together—they were forty strong—and marching by night, had broken in first upon Bard at Hella and haled him from his bed. Dazed and with his teeth clattering in his head, he had stood in his own hall before armed men with pine-wood torches.

"What do you want of me, neighbours? I have never harmed a soul, and will you bear me a grudge for that?"

"You shall come with us, you and your household," they said, "or there's an end of you."

"A man will work for his life," said Bard, "if needs will have it. But what am I to do for mine?" Then he was told.

"We are going to Stock, to set light to Thorbiorn's house. You must be in it, or die here."

"Eh, I will come with you," said Bard; "and why should I not? They egged me on to fight with your father, and when I had served their turn, threw me over. They are nothing to me, as little as I am to them. If that is all you want, you are easily paid."

Increased by ten men they set their faces now to Surnadale, and reached the House of Stock in the small hours. A steady wind was blowing up the dale from the sea, carrying cold mist with it. It was cold and raw, but yet wet enough to melt the snow. That fell with heavy flop from the branches of pines, and made the ways difficult; but there was still light enough thrown from it for them to see what they were about.

At Stock everything was quiet. They helped themselves to kindling from the outbuildings, reared a great pile at the front door, another at the door of the storehouse, and set light to each. The wind blew directly upon the greater fire and drowned the house in smoke. The

besiegers with their weapons lined up on the weather side to see that nobody came out alive. In a very short time the roof caught, and the flame ran over it like a nest of flat-headed snakes suddenly let loose. There was some shouting which could not be restrained, for the sight of destruction drives men mad.

It was the shouting which awoke Gisli. He sat up in bed, felt the smoke in his nose, and instantly knew what it was. He plunged into the hall, and saw the throbbing of the light between the window-slats. He listened and heard then the crackling and roaring overhead. The door was near six inches thick, and would hold yet awhile. He ran into the storehouse, and saw another fire, but smaller. By that time he was joined by Thorkel, and one or two of his men. "We are trapped here," Thorkel said.

"I think not," said Gisli, "but I am going to find out. Go you and waken our father; fetch Thordis and whom else you can. Glum, come you with me." Glum was a hind.

Thorkel sped away. Gisli took two men with him, and unfastened some of the bolts of the

false wall of his storehouse. Then he was able to push out some of the outside planks and put his head and shoulders through. He came back into the room. "There is fire, but I can put it out." He looked quickly round at the stores. "Get your buckets," he said. "I have it."

They came with buckets. "I will get outside," he said. "Fill your buckets of that whey there and pass them out to me." There were two great barrels of sour milk standing in the storehouse. With it he was able to put out the fire on that side the house. Before he had done it Thorbiorn, Thordis, Thorkel and ten or twelve more were in the storehouse.

Gisli took the lead directly he was back in the room. "You are all armed? Good. Now follow me out, and keep in the thick of the smoke. Follow it up into the woods. They will never find us—they will never look for us to be out this way. They will be before the door and clear of the smother. Are you ready? Then I will go."

He went through the hole in the wall, and stood to help out the others. He was quite

cool, and his plain, sensible, cheerful, every-day self. Thorbiorn was choking with rage, and Thorkel was for rushing round upon the foe; but Gisli would not hear of it. "They will be fifty or sixty men at the very least. You will have your turn at them by and by. But, we are beaten at the moment and must hide ourselves." He led them into the woods, and steadily mounted the hill. There were crags upon the top, and certain caves in them which he knew well. There they crouched and saw the destruction of Stock. When the roof fell in the flames leapt up, as it seemed, above their heads.

After that they saw the fire die down, for the mist turned to driving rain as the dawn came on, and there was even some hope of saving a few things from the wreckage.

It was still Gisli who ordered the forlorn camp. He set men to building a fire in the cave, he sent others out to the tenantry for food and coverings; he went himself to spy for the enemy, and could come back and report them all away. It was not very long before he

was at work making a cover for their heads; but he would not suffer the old house to be set up again, and, having Thorkel on his side for once, was able to persuade his father that when all was done which remained to be done, Surnadale would be no place for them.

He intended to repay Skeggi in kind, for, according to him, that was mere justice. But, as he said, a life of running warfare was not to his taste. He was himself for Iceland, and if his kinsfolk would not go with him, he would go without them. His father was the only one who had any feeling in the matter. He was well past middle age and spoke of himself, and acted too, as if he were much older than he was. Thorkel was very indifferent whither he went; Thordis wanted to go; and as Thordis and Gisli were the strong minds of the family, the thing was settled. "Good," said Gisli, when he had his father's undertaking. "Now I will set about ship-building with a free heart. You will not see me here yet awhile."

He was as good as his word, for they had no sight or report of him until the end of the

following summer, when he brought into the frith a fine roomy vessel with two boats astern.

It should be said here what, among other things, was found in the ruins of Stock, a roll of undressed oxhide, and within it the two pieces of a broken sword. They were brought up by Gisli to his father, with the question, "Whose sword was that?" Thorbiorn took them into his hands. "That sword should be sacred to you," he said, "for it cost the life of your kinsman, my brother, and gave me the estate which has reared you. That is the sword Grayflanks, the best sword in the world."

He told the story over. Gisli's comment upon it was that it was an unchancy thing to have about. "It has done mischief enough, for one thing, and looks as if it can never do any more. Why should you keep it?" Thorbiorn was handling the pieces. "Feel the edge, my son," he said. "You will never smithy a sword like that in your days." Gisli admitted the fineness of the temper, but said that there must have been a flaw in it—"otherwise how should it break in that manner?" Thorbiorn

said, "It was used against its owner. It would sooner die itself than slay him."

Gisli believed it. "Well, we will give it houseroom," he said, "though plainly there is no luck in the thing." So Grayflanks abode at Stock, and in due time went to Iceland with Thorbiorn and his sons.

V

BEGINNING AGAIN

GISLI, after a long and harassing voyage, brought his ship round the Horn and westward to the great firths. He sailed into Dyrafirth, which is both narrow and deep, and cast anchor in the mouth of the Hawkdale water. He looked up that dark dale settling down into the night, and wondered what fate had in store for him in this land of mountain and swift water. Hawkdale itself was so narrow, its mountain masses so tall, that his eye lost itself in the dark less than half-way up. But he heard the thunder of the force far out of sight, and could picture the wet rocks and tossing branches of its outleap to the sea. Out in the open the scene was not so mournful. The waters of the firth were a sheet of silver; and though mountains rose beyond it, and on every side which the eye could take in, they

were further off. Good land lay between them and the sea; he noticed cattle out in the pastures, on the lower slopes; among the turf and bracken, sheep were crawling, no bigger than maggots. Smoke rose in a straight blue column from a hidden house across the firth. He saw haystacks near by. So men lived and laboured and loved here, and it might be allowed him to be one of them. Norway, Surnadale and hateful things forced upon him by necessity, all lay behind him. Fire and sword, ill-blood, slaughter upon slaughter, all past and over now! So at least he longed to believe.

In the morning when the sun gilded the water and burnt the hills—only Hawkdale still gloomed in dark—there were boats at the ship's side, and others on the way, while on the shore were groups of people looking at them and talking about them. Portly men, cloaked and booted, came up the side and greeted Thorbiorn with gravity and careful words, non-committal. In such affairs as these Thorbiorn still took the lead, an old man of commanding presence, fiery eyes half hidden under his brows, and a jutting

white beard. By him stood Thorkel, his handsome son, in the fine raiment which he loved; and Thordis, too, blue-eyed and high-coloured, with her fair hair in one long and thick plait more than halfway down her back. She also dressed herself rarely, in scarlet cloth of the finest face; with long gold ear-rings in her ears and a gold girdle round her loins. Gisli, who had been working hard since the grey of the dawn, was in shirt and cotton breeches, with bare feet and arms. His hair was rough, his beard untrimmed. Nobody noticed him; and he, full of his business with the crew, had no thoughts to spare for company. So while the chief men of the place were below with Thorbiorn and Thorkel, Gisli was unloading the ship, getting out tents, taking them ashore, putting them up, and setting the women to work with fires and cooking-pots. The people on shore, however, were friendly and disposed to help him. It was while he was busy there that a bright-eyed, good-looking young man of his own age picked him out of all his hands for welcome. He said that his name was Vestan, that he lived

at Hest on Aunundarfirth, and had come over about some cattle which he had bought. Gisli took to him at once, and made no concealment of his plans. He said that there had been great trouble in Norway—burnings and slaughters into which his family had been dragged against its will. He hoped to settle quietly in this new country; and then, "We shall be glad of your help, too, if you are disposed to grant it." Vestan said that he would do everything he could.

"And where do you think of looking for land?" he asked. Gisli looked about him, as if he were going to choose on the spot. His eye fell on dark Hawkdale.

"It looks quiet up there," he said.

Vestan laughed. "You will hear little but the force. As for the land, it is good, what there is of it. But the sun never gets there except in high summer; and I don't know much about the neighbours you will have. Now I should like you to see my house at Hest. It stands high, on a shoulder of the mountain, full in the sun. We have grazing in plenty all about

us, and a little cornland too; but the best of that lies below us on the firth. Before you settle on anything I hope you will pay me a visit."

"I will surely come," said Gisli, and Vestan showed his fine white teeth.

"Come soon, then, for who knows when I may be off? My business is on the sea, you must know, but I am at home just now to refit, and hope to stay out the harvest."

"Trust me," said Gisli, "and many thanks to you. My father will buy what land suits him best, I suppose; but I should like to settle down on my own account soon, and will see your country before I do."

"You are married?" Vestan asked him. Gisli shook his head.

"No—but I have thought about it."

"You will see my wife at Hest," said Vestan, "and then you will have no doubts. And my sister Aud lives with us. And two strong boys of mine you will see at Hest." They parted with cordial words, the best of friends; and Gisli's heart was uplifted. "I am not much of

a one for friendship," he thought, "but I take greatly to that seaman. It will be my fault if we are not close friends in times to come."

When the camp was shipshape and the meal under way, Gisli rowed out to the ship to fetch off his people. He found that his father had spoken for some land belonging to a certain Thorkel Ericsson and intended to see it as soon as might be. That land lay halfway up Hawkdale, on either side the river, and was called Seaboll. There was a good site for a house upon it, and Thorbiorn determined to have it if he could settle the price to his liking. That took some time, as Thorbiorn was obstinate and the owner greedy. Gisli thought it a good opportunity to ride over the hills into Aunundarfirth to see his friend Vestan.

He was well received there, in a good and roomy house, by Vestan and his wife Gunnhilda; and there he saw Aud, the grave-eyed sister of Vestan, and lost his heart to her. It was not that many words passed between them; and it was not either that her comeliness, colour

and shape drew his desire towards her. He thought afterwards that she seemed the home of peace, and quiet and gentle thoughts. He said, That is a girl to whom I could bring my troubles, being sure that she would understand them without much spoken. Again he thought, She is beautiful as the evening is beautiful and not as the day. And yet again, Her eyes are like lakes when the moon is rising and the wind falling. And it seemed to him that her name, Aud, became her well, and him too, the child of destiny. For Aud means Fate, and Fate rules men.

He spent two happy days in her company and then rode back into Hawkdale to find the land taken up, and his father and brother vexed at his absence. They expected him to build the housestead for them.

He was not to disappoint them, but set to work at once and never left off till he had finished it. Vestan came over more than twice to help him, and they made a fine, roomy house of it, and finished it down to the last bolt before the winter. Thorkel was away most of the

time, staying with various friends he had made. He was always the popular man.

Gisli told Vestan the state of his feelings towards his sister Aud, and Vestan took the news very well. "Any man might be happy with her," he said, "but it could not be said of you, my friend, that you would suit every woman."

"No, indeed," said Gisli. "My brother Thorkel is the man for that."

"A fine dashing man he is," Vestan said, "and your sister Thordis is of his make and favour. But I warrant Aud would choose for you before Thorkel, if I know anything of her."

"It is likely that she will have the chance of it," Gisli said. "I never saw a girl like her in my days. To be sure, I have had small dealings with women."

"That is by no means the case with me," Vestan said. "I am well off now, but don't deserve to be."

"I believe that for the most part we get what we have deserved," said Gisli, "but I

grant you that your fate is not always in your own hands. Consider my case, now. No more peaceable man lives in the world than myself, and yet for the last two or three years I have been involved in strife and man-slayings, never of my seeking. A man beguiled my sister Thordis, and refused to stop it. Twice he refused. He was my brother's friend and might have listened to him. But Thorkel would say nothing, and the second time he refused me I hit him—once. But it killed him. And so it has gone on without end. I believe myself that I am an unlucky man, and think so much of Aud that, for her sake, I scarce dare put it to her. Now what do you say to that?"

Vestan said, "I would ask her if I were in your case. I think a man should follow his mind."

"If I do that," Gisli said, "there's no doubt whither it will lead me."

That winter he contrived to be two or three times at Hest, though he said nothing to Aud

of his feelings towards her. She told her sister-in-law that she liked him more than a little. "If he asks for me he shall have me," she said.

VI

PARTNERSHIP

THORBIORN SOUR lived just a year in his new house, and then died of a cold in the chest. They buried him in the hillside, and reared a mound over him, and that evening the brothers and sister talked over what they should do. It was a question whether they should divide the inheritance or stay on as they were. The latter was what Thorkel wanted. He never did any work, and did not intend to do any if he could help it. Gisli, he knew, would work all day and be miserable if he did not. That suited Thorkel exactly; so when Gisli said with some hesitation that he was thinking of marrying, Thorkel said at once, "So am I." Thordis opened her blue eyes.

"Why, whom do you intend to marry?" she asked Thorkel.

He told her. "It is Asgerd, daughter of

Thobiorn Seal-knop of Talknafirth." There was no gainsaying her quality. She was a very pretty girl indeed, a rich one, and much courted. Thordis turned to Gisli.

"And who is your choice, then?" He told her.

Thordis said, "I am none the wiser, as I have never seen her. But I guess her to be a quiet and steady girl, or you would never have picked her out."

"She is all of that," said Gisli.

"Then she is unlike her brother Vestan," Thorkel said. "I will answer for it that he has sat in many a lady's bower."

Thorkel admired Vestan for his good looks and readiness in talk. Then he came back to his first intention.

"I see no reason why we should not all live together very simply. The house is plenty large enough, and it is not to be supposed Thordis will stay in it very long. Our wives will get on well enough if we do; and I am not a quarrelsome man by any means. Nor are you."

Gisli said, "Certainly not. But if Thordis

marries she must have her dower, and that would be her share of the land, or the house itself."

"Time enough when she marries," said Thorkel. Thordis, for her part, wished to be married; but she was very particular about mankind, and by no means for anybody's asking. She was a slashing, high-stepping girl, very proud and free in her ways.

Thorkel at any rate lost no time about his affair, but went off immediately to Talknafirth and had his interview with Seal-knop. He had already come to an understanding with his Asgerd, and was very much in love with her. She was a fair girl with a beautiful skin and shapely body, a girl who seemed very simple, but had had much experience. She would have been married long before but for that. She was known in the neighbourhood for a girl of many love-affairs, and while men will amuse themselves with her sort they think twice before taking them home. Thorkel knew nothing of all that, and it was nobody's business to tell him. She charmed his eyes and beguiled his

other senses. People said that she could do what she liked with him—but that was because they only knew her, while they guessed at him. Thorkel was very idle and very easy to deal with; yet Gisli knew that there was more in him than he chose to display.

After the wedding at Talknafirth, Thorkel came home to Seaboll with his new wife, who made herself gracious to Gisli and Thordis, and seemed pleased with everything. Then it was Gisli's turn to go a-wooing, and as his habit was he said very little, but thought very much, about it. However, Asgerd made him say something. She knew both Aud and her brother very well, it seemed. "Not," she said, "that any one would believe them brother and sister; for they are each other's opposites. Vestan is merry and Aud sad; he talks all day, and she says nothing. He is as black as night, and she is fair-skinned. To be sure, her hair is brown; but she has grey eyes, and his are coal-black."

"I don't think Aud is sad," Gisli said. He was afflicted by all this chatter.

"If she is not sad it is because you have made her happy," said Asgerd. "But you will allow she has not the good spirits of Vestan. Vestan, I can tell you, has broken hearts in his time."

"Not yours at least," Thorkel said, who had been lying on the hearth, listening. Asgerd blushed and smiled at him.

"No, indeed. That is left for you to do," she told him. He was pleased.

As soon as might be—which was when the passes were open—Gisli set off for Hest. Aud heard him out, and gave him her hand at once, with hardly a word spoken, but a clear Yes. Gisli praised Heaven for such a way of dealing, exactly what he would have expected of her. From that moment forth there was never a cloud upon their perfect understanding. No two people ever said less or made more out of unspoken intercourse than those two, Gisli and Aud. It was as if they conversed by other faculties, by touch, for instance, or neighbourhood. And each knew what the other was thinking by divination, and was never wrong. "If I had travelled the world, from Garth to

Ireland," Gisli said to Vestan, "if I had done all you have done twice over, I had never found a woman so exactly to my need as I have found here." Vestan said, "I knew what was coming when I saw you first. She will never fail you —that I promise."

When he brought Aud to Seaboll, Vestan came with her, and stayed some days. Everybody at Seaboll liked him, including Thordis, who was hard to satisfy in the matter of men. When one took pains to please her she said that she hated to have a man always dragging at her skirt; if he paid her little attention she said that he treated her as if she were a sheep or a cow. But Vestan treated men and women exactly the same, and seemed to think that what was interesting to one sex would interest the other. He had a charming smile, and ready, laughing eyes. You could see in very few minutes how fond brother and sister were of one another, and also how both had opened their hearts to let Gisli in. As for Gisli himself, that odd, shy, retired fellow had never been so happy

in his life. He had never been able to express himself—and here were two who understood him before he tried to speak. He had always been at work, with folk about him who accepted the fruits of his work without interest in how it was obtained. Now here was Aud, to the full as busy as he, and as much concerned as he was in what was done, doing or to do—a woman to whom it was never needful to explain yourself, and better still, a woman who did not take it amiss that you should take her love for granted. Of her passion in love none could know but Gisli. To the rest of the world the pair of them showed as friends and partners in life rather than lovers. But Gisli knew better—and of course Vestan, knowing his sister, divined the rest. Of those two, Vestan and Aud, the brother was at the moment the popular one at Seaboll. Thordis approved of him, and Thorkel admired him.

Thorkel admired Vestan for his good looks, good clothes and fine heedless way of dealing with the affairs of this world. That was how he had always pictured himself behaving;

but he knew in his inmost heart that Vestan was the better man. Vestan was a sailor who had travelled far and wide, seen much of men, and measured his strength with them. Thorkel had never done anything except marry a very pretty woman. He was tender on her account, and believed that he had really lost his heart to her. That interested him because, so far as he knew, he had never before cared for anybody but himself. "It is refreshing to feel that you have given away your heart into the keeping of another person," he thought. "I love my wife and would deny her nothing. No man is worth a rush who cannot say that. But I can say it with sincerity, and for the first time in my life." He watched her way of dealing with the others in the house. She was rather careful with Thordis, who was apt to trample without knowing that she did it. With Aud she was much easier. She had a great deal to say to Aud, used to whisper and laugh with her while she was busy with sewing, or in the kitchen at her housework. He wondered what on earth she had to say which involved so much

lowering of the voice, and was dappled with so many bursts of laughter. And used to listen, and look steadily at the work she was doing. He heard her murmured Yes and No, or some measured comment now and again; but certainly the talking was done by Asgerd. He thought she was shy in the company of men. She rarely spoke to Vestan unless he happened to catch her eye when he was ending some tale of the sea. He used to ask her sometimes when they were in bed what she thought of Vestan, but she would hide her face in his shoulder and cling to him; and he laughed, and said, "You will make me jealous one of these days." Then, "Oh, no, no, no," she used to say, and kiss him eagerly. All that made Thorkel as happy as a child with a kitten.

But Vestan was away at the end of a week, and the partners at Seaboll settled down to the business of their estate. They had a good deal of land altogether, running up Hawkdale on both sides of the river for the better part of a mile. They had grassland and cornland, a good head of cattle, and some five hundred

sheep on the hills. There was work for fifteen hands, and Gisli was with them from morning till night. The greater part of the household work fell to Aud, for much the same reason as the outdoor work was all Gisli's—because she liked to be busy. Thordis took her share; but Asgerd did very little except sewing, and that her own and her husband's.

VII

CODBITER'S SON

THE next thing important to the bearing of this tale was the marriage of Thordis, which came about in this way. The household at Seaboll, well established by marriage already, and prosperous under Gisli's management, was fitted to take part in public affairs, such as they were; and Thorkel for his part could not be satisfied until they made some kind of a show. There were two Things commonly held in their country; one in Dyrafirth itself, and one at Thorsness, which was south of them on Broadfirth, and that one was the greatest of all held in the west parts. So one Spring Gisli and Thorkel, with a goodly company, went down to Thorsness, and received the hospitality of the great man of the place, Thorstan Codbiter. In his family, and especially with his two sons, Thorgrim and Bork, they struck up a friend-

ship, and before they went home it was a settled thing that the Codbiter's sons should come up to Valsere Thing on Dyrafirth and stay at Seaboll. That led to the marriage of Thordis, whose good looks and bold bearing hit Codbiter's son Thorgrim between the eyes, as it were, and left him no peace. Before he went he asked Thorkel for her and the match was agreed upon. Thordis, who felt uncomfortable at home, made no objection to Thorgrim—and indeed he was a fine, incisive, upstanding man, broad-shouldered, black-bearded, red-faced and black-eyed. He had been married once already and had two sons nearly come to manhood; he was Priest of Frey at Thorsness, an important and noteworthy man. His brother Bork was very much like him, but younger, fatter and less of a great man.

The wedding was pushed through almost at once; for Thorgrim was in a hurry. Next it was settled that Seaboll should be given up to the couple for Thordis' portion, and the brothers build themselves a house upon their share of the estate higher up the dale. They

found a good site at Holl and set to work—that is, Gisli set to work—housebuilding at once. When he had finished, the two estates marched with each other, the two houses were less than a mile apart, and Thordis began to enjoy herself. Her stepsons did not live with her, but remained with Bork at Thorsness, where in due course the Codbiter, at the end of his fishing, died and was buried.

When all these things were done, the rift which there had always been in Gisli's family declared itself. They saw very little of Thordis at Holl, though Thorgrim her husband was very often there. In fact it was Thorgrim who egged his brothers-in-law on to make much more of an appearance abroad than Gisli, for his part, cared about. Thorkel, a vain man, took kindly to it, which made it difficult for Gisli to avoid his part. Hence began attendances in force at the Thing, and a great show of men in steel caps, carrying spears. Taken together and with Vestan and his men added to them, they made some forty spears.

The fast friendship between Vestan and Gisli

brought the handsome sailor over to Holl whenever he was at home. He was not so welcome at Seaboll, where Thordis had the ordering of affairs. Thorgrim always seemed very friendly and glad to see him, and Thorkel admired him; but it was Gisli who really loved him, and if Gisli had been away he had never come into Hawkdale at all. This was put to the proof one day after the whole band of them had been over at the Thorness Thing and dominated the assembly by their bold bearing and readiness for offence. Riding home together, Thorgrim, who was very much elated by the way things had turned out, proposed a bond of brotherhood which he said would serve to keep them up to their present high level. Gisli was quite willing, he said, though he did not believe in such ceremonies. "If we love each other, it follows that we trust each other," he said. "If we trust each other, it follows that we can count upon each other's support. I doubt if an oath will better the belief—but don't suppose that I will draw back from it." Thorkel was all for the oath, and

Vestan said he would do what the others did.

There they left it; but when they were home again it was Gisli who took the lead; and he was moved to do it by a saying of Guest the Wise which had been repeated to him, to the effect that the Hawkdale men would not always be of the same mind in everything as they were now. It had always been a secret fear of Gisli's that strife might break out again as it had before in Norway. He had not breathed a word of that fear even to Aud, still less to Vestan, but it haunted him.

So when they were in sight of Holl he reined up on a good stretch of turf and said, "Now let us carry out what we intended. Here is good turf to lift." They cut a long strip of turf and freed it from the ground the length of it, leaving the two ends fast. This turf they lifted upon a spear until a man could pass easily below it, as under a yoke. All four of them stood round about, and were to open a vein each that his blood might mingle with the ground below the turf-yoke. Gisli was the first to do it. He slashed at his bare arm and let

the blood drip to the ground. Vestan followed him; and then it was Thorgrim's turn. He had a knife in his hand, his other arm bared and stretched out; but suddenly he shook his rolled sleeve down and covered his skin. Gisli looked sharply at him.

"No," said Thorgrim, "I won't do it."

Vestan was still smiling, but the smile was stretched and bleak.

Gisli said, "What is this? You will not, when it was you who proposed it?"

Thorgrim held to it. "It is going too far. I am ready to uphold your and Thorkel's affairs to the uttermost. It is natural. We are akin, and kindreds should stick together. But Vestan is no kindred of mine; and what do I know of his relationships? and where may his affairs land me at last?"

Gisli said, "It is a great slight on my brother-in-law and friend. This project may turn out differently from your intention." Vestan touched his shoulder.

"I don't think a slight was intended, at any

rate," he said. "Let it be enough that you and I have sworn a brotherhood."

"We had one without the bloodshedding," Gisli said, "but now it is a sanctified thing." Thorgrim had turned away. It is odd that nobody had asked Thorkel what he intended to do.

They came to Holl and said farewell to Thorgrim, who said he should go on to Seaboll without stay. No one pressed him to alight. Nothing passed between Gisli and Vestan so long as Thorkel was with them; nothing was told to Aud by either of them—but Gisli was very much troubled in mind, slept badly, rose up early, and was at work at his forge long before any one else was stirring.

When Vestan came into the shed where he worked, Gisli looked up. His eyes smiled, though the rest of his face did not.

"What are you at so early?" Vestan said; and Gisli, "Come and see."

He showed him a broad silver coin, cut neatly in half. Each half was toothed, in such a way

that the two could be fitted together again, and no severance visible.

"Very neat," Vestan said, "but what will you do with it?"

Gisli gave him one half the coin. "Half is yours, half mine," he told him. "When those halves are joined again it is a certainty that trouble is afoot. Let us agree that we call upon each other by this means, but only when life and death are in the balance. Do you agree to that?"

Vestan laughed. "Oh, yes. But you are serious about it, and I am not, though I am willing to become so."

Gisli was most serious. "I see in what Thorgrim did yesterday a danger to our happiness here," he said. "Perhaps it is a folly of mine to try to provide against fate; but it is very natural. I feel that one or other of us two may be in peril in time to come. It will be you, I believe."

Vestan still smiled at him, but very temperately. "My business takes me into

danger," he said. "You know that I must soon be at sea again."

"Yes," said Gisli, "I know that. If my premonitions are right, you will be safer there than in Hawkdale. Be that as it may, keep my half-coin by you, and let me not see it again until you wish to warn me of my life. So it shall be with that which I hold now." At that moment Aud stood in the doorway, and both men looked at her.

"I came to tell you that your breakfast was ready," she said. "But what are you two about so early?" Gisli enquired of Vestan with his eyes, "Shall we tell her?" Vestan answered him in words, "When I am gone."

Aud came to where they stood by the forge and put a hand upon either man's shoulder. They were the two persons she loved best in the world. "What are you talking about? Am I not to be told?"

"You are to be told everything," Gisli said, "and you shall hear all about it—but not now. Let us go in."

They went into the hall together. Aud had taken Gisli's arm; but her other hand was held in Vestan's.

In the hall was Asgerd, with sharp eyes. Thorkel was still in bed.

VIII

OVERHEARD

THE time was June, with Vestan three months at sea, when Thorkel, the idle man, was to be jarred to the very heart of him. Out of the sweetest day of summer was to blow upon him a chill blast of air to freeze his blood; and out of the softest lips in the world shoot, as you might say, the barb to pierce him.

He had had his breakfast late and alone; for Gisli had gone out with the first ray of the sun, and had out all hands to the haymaking. It was a summer's day, with a gay wind blowing up the dale from the firth. He had seen on the upland levels how the brake-fern was swept white by it. The hay was all cut and lying, and now was the time to make it. So Gisli was abroad, and not a man but Thorkel left upon the place.

And the women too had done their housework and were in the bower at their sewing. Thorkel, stretching himself at ease in the sun at the door, heard the murmur of their voices —Asgerd's sharp and clear, with a hint of complaining in it, as if a string in her harp was a little worn; and then Aud's lower and fuller but less audible, a voice of contentment, a rich, soothful voice. Thorkel laughed as he stretched himself. "How they chatter, the women—and all about nothing!" He thought it would amuse him to go round and overhear them: he had nothing to do, and the seat below the bower was full South.

Soft-foot, chuckling to himself, he reached the bench and stretched himself at length upon it. For a while the two women worked in silence; then Asgerd broke that by saying, "How quiet you are. I suppose you and Gisli never talk when you are abed together."

"What we do," said Aud, "is between us."

"I warrant it is," said Asgerd, "and with all my heart." And then she sighed.

Presently she broke out again, with com-

plaint in her voice. "My dear, here's a thing you will do better than I."

"What is that?" Aud asked her.

"Why, to cut out a shirt for me. I have no hand today—and not much any day, woe's me."

"Thorkel's shirt, I suppose?" said Aud.

"Of course. Whose else?" Thorkel smiled.

Silence for a minute, and then Aud said quietly, "If it were for Vestan you would not ask me to do it, I know."

Thorkel's heart stopped beating; but he did not move.

"You know too much, my dear," Asgerd said; and Aud, "I wish I did not know that."

"It can't be helped," said Asgerd recklessly; "Vestan stands alone for me. Since first I saw him, long before I knew Thorkel, there was only one man in the world. You must have known that, surely."

"Yes, I knew it," Aud said, "but we need not talk about it."

"Why should we not? What harm can it do? Vestan will never know—and if he should,—Oh, I would trust him with all I have!"

"Why should we talk of what can never be?" said Aud.

"It is good for me to talk sometimes, God knows," Asgerd replied. "If women cannot tell each other their secrets, it is all wretchedness and wrong. But I have done no harm to any one. How can I help my heart? Or you, for that matter? Were there not meetings between Thorgrim and you once upon a time?"

"Long ago," said Aud. "But since I was given to Gisli I never looked at another man twice."

"Oh, yes, I know. You two are happy together. It is easy seen. And if I had had Vestan, I dare swear——"

"Say no more of Vestan, I beg you," said Aud, and Asgerd was quiet.

Thorkel sat up, staring. He looked old, with pale, haggard eyes. And it was cold out there; and what to do with himself he didn't know. He left the bench where he was stuck, and moved off on tiptoe. A shadow passed over the window-sill, and Aud saw it.

"Some one was there. Some one has been listening," she said. Asgerd's blue eyes flickered.

"That was Thorkel. What shall I do now?"

Aud's eyes were quite steady. "You must tell him about it tonight. Tell him all of it. It is the only plan." But it did not convince Asgerd.

"No, it will be better to make little of it. I will make it a joke between us two. Then if he seem still vexed I will coax him till he loves me. I can do that if I will. But maybe your way is wiser."

"It is wiser for me at least," said Aud. "I shall tell Gisli everything, and follow his counsel in everything."

The day passed heavily for the two girls. Thorkel did not come in till dusk, and how he had spent the day nobody knew, himself least of any. His contentment in his idle life was gone, and he honestly grieved over that. He had not yet discovered that his self-esteem was mortally wounded, for, vain man as he was, he was also an affectionate and kindly man.

The longer he stayed out, however, the more difficult it became to go back.

Gisli at once saw that something was wrong with his brother. He ate scarcely anything, drank like a fish, and sat with his elbows on the board, staring at nothing. He thought, too, that Aud looked anxious. Asgerd chattered and laughed all suppertime, and even rallied Thorkel, who scowled at her but did not answer. When supper was over Thorkel went to the door and leaned there, looking out on the mountain. Gisli followed him and put his hand on his shoulder.

"What is wrong?" he asked him.

"Nothing at all."

"Don't tell me that. Are you ill?"

Thorkel was tragic. "I am worse than ill."

"Is it my fault? Have I done anything to offend you?"

"Nothing at all. How could that be?"

"I don't know. I cannot convict myself of anything. If I could I would amend it. I set great store by your affection."

"Why should you?" said Thorkel. "What do I do to deserve it?"

"These things don't run in that way," said Gisli. "They run in the veins. But I hope you will tell me what troubles you."

Thorkel would not, or could not. "You will know it all soon. I cannot tell you now."

Thereupon he turned back into the house and went to bed without any words with anybody else. Asgerd waited until he was in bed, and then, after a look at Aud, went softly away to him. Once alone with him, she knew best how to deal with him. He heard her soft words, felt her soft arms about him, and because he loved her very much took her to his heart and let her sleep there. He himself did not sleep for a long time; but she slept sound. He told himself that so gentle a bosom could not harbour his injury; but the injury done him lay elsewhere. All his resentment burned in him still —and the fire of it showed him always the laughing eyes and white teeth of Vestan. That is the way such things mostly turn in the world, where man will always measure himself against

man. Thorkel was vain, and therefore diffident. He grudged Vestan his good looks and light heart, and hated him for them because he felt that he had had both himself if Vestan had not robbed him.

As for Aud and Gisli, their eyes met, and that was enough. She told him everything, and blamed herself for having brought it about. "Don't be angry with me," she said, "and think how you can help Vestan, for I know it will all be laid up against him."

Gisli said shortly, "I think it will. Thorkel will take this hard."

"What shall we do?"

"There is nothing to do," he said. "What is to be must be."

"Do you blame me?"

"No, not at all. Fate must have its way. You and I are tools in its hand. As well might I blame myself for having brought Vestan hither, or for having chosen you. Now I foresee that the end of this is not to be in our hands. We could deal with Thorkel, I believe. But Thorkel doesn't stand alone. Now let us go to

sleep, for I am tired and you are troubled."

Aud clung to him. "If you have no blame for me I have no need to be troubled."

"I shall never have blame in my heart for you," said Gisli. Then they slept.

That which Gisli had foreseen, but said nothing about, came to pass. Thorkel took his griefs over to Seaboll and possessed Thorgrim and Thordis of them. It then came out that Thordis hated Vestan, and did not like Aud. Her blue eyes glittered.

"You have to quit Holl, that is plain," she said. "You had better bring Asgerd here. She will be looked after here."

Thorkel thought she was right, but said, "Gisli will be troubled."

"It is Gisli," said Thordis, "who brought the trouble about. He cannot have it all ways."

"Gisli would rather have his brother-in-law than his brother at Holl, I believe," Thorgrim said. "You must do what is proper in your own eyes. One thing only you may be sure of. Vestan won't come here after Asgerd." All three of them assumed that the pursuit had

been his doing. As for Thorkel himself, he fully believed it.

The end of such talk—and there was a deal of it, the subject endlessly brooded on by Thorkel, and ruthlesly handled by Thorgrim and Thordis—the end was that at the fall of the year Thorkel told Gisli that they must part. Gisli had been prepared for it, but disliked it so much that he pleaded with his brother. "Let your discomforts be forgotten," he said. "Be sure that you will get no greater love from any than you do from us. I ask you to stay here."

"No, no," said Thorkel, "it can't be. I cannot meet Vestan here, nor ask you to keep him away." Gisli was astonished.

"Is it possible that you still believe Vestan thinks of Asgerd? I can't suppose it. But as I know much more about him than you do, I can assure you that he has never had a thought of her in his life."

"It may be so, it may be so," said Thorkel, irritated that he could not contradict him. "But I must think for Asgerd first—and, in

fine, they wish for me at Seaboll, so we must go there."

It was then settled between them that the land and goods should be divided in this way—the land to Gisli, the goods to Thorkel. Everything that was not Gisli's own or Aud's own property, fell therefore to leave Holl; and there was such a routing out of coffers as had not happened for many a day. In turning over the gear, it was Thorkel who brought to light the pieces of the great sword Grayflanks, which had been brought over to Iceland by Thorbiorn Sour himself. Gisli knew them again, but Thorkel did not; but now Thorkel handled them with curiosity.

"What steel—hey? Whose was this sword?" So Gisli told him the tale, and Thorkel heard him out; and then put the two pieces among the goods which fell to him.

"Do you take that away with you?" Gisli asked, and Thorkel, who was busy with other wares, just gave a glance at the old sword, as he said, "It was our father's, you say? Yes, I take that."

There were two children in the house at Holl, a brother and sister, children of a kinsman. Geirmund was the boy, Gudrid the girl; they also were to be shared. Thorkel, having first choice, said he would have the boy. So Gudrid fell to Gisli, and seemed glad of it. Directly Thorkel had said, "Then I will have Geirmund," Gudrid, without a word said, put her hand in Gisli's. He, looking down, smiled at her in the midst of his trouble.

And so he saw Thorkel go with a heavy heart, for he loved his brother and was neither able to say so nor to declare it in any other way than by working for him all day and every day without looking for thanks or payment.

IX

FORGING OF THE SPEAR

BEFORE the winter closed in upon Hawkdale it had fallen out as Gisli had foreseen, that there was a rift between the two houses of Holl and Seaboll. Although in most outward things the three kinsmen met each other, yet it was a matter of common observation that Thordis never, and Thorgrim very seldom, crosed the threshold at Holl. Thorkel and Asgerd came sometimes, and sometimes one of them without the other; but Aud, who was as proud as fire, would never go to Seaboll so long as Thordis kept away from Holl; and Gisli, who was not proud at all, saw that she had reason.

"I believe now," he said to her one day, "that Thordis has never loved me, but if you were to ask me why, I could not for the life of me tell you." Aud, who was sewing, said quietly, "Then maybe I can tell *you*."

"Women can see further into the heart than men," said Gisli. "I wish you would tell me."

"Well, I can only tell you what you have told me yourself. Did you not slay a man who beguiled her?"

Gisli started. "Kolbiorn? Yes, I did. My father gave me no peace until that was done. But you are wrong. Thordis had no love for Kolbiorn."

"No," said Aud, "that is likely. But she had great love for Thordis. I am sure that she resented your meddling in her affairs."

Gisli believed her. He sighed. "There is no escape from an ill deed. And yet that deed was not so ill neither. Kolbiorn was dishonouring my sister. His slaying should have been done by Thorkel, who is the elder of us —but our father never so much as asked him to do it. He never asked Thorkel to do anything."

Aud looked at him with grave tenderness. "You work for everybody; you bear all people's burdens, and few thank you for what you do.

But every morning and every night I am thankful for your love."

Gisli was moved by her good words. "My dear," he said, "no man should ask more of life than the love of you and Vestan. Yet I am so made that I love my own kindred for no better reason than that we have the same parents."

She loved him for the thought, yet found the prudence in her heart to disapprove it. "Dear friend," she said, "it is to your detriment that in loving the children of your parents you don't love yourself a little more."

"Oh, myself!" he laughed at her. "I have never been taught to do that. All my life I have been taken as a matter of course. Is anything wrong? Gisli will mend it. What is he here for but that! And it is a fact that I don't love myself at all." She made a movement towards him; he saw love in her eyes. He moved over to her side, embraced and kissed her. Aud returned his kiss with passion.

"Love yourself for my sake," she said brokenly, "for I have no one but you. If I

cannot give you a child, be you my child, Gisli." It was true that they had no child; and a great grief that was.

That winter Gisli had a feast at Holl, as the custom was, and when it came to asking people to come, it turned out, as he had expected, that Seaboll was to have one at the same time. That was a new thing and did not help to smooth over differences, except that it gave an excuse to Thorkel for not coming to Gisli's merrymaking. The worst work it did was to split up the dale into two parties. However, Gisli went to work at it with his accustomed spirit, and there was every chance of its turning out well. Aud's kindred and friends alone would have made a large assembly. The house was to be full to overflowing—and what more could you want?

At Seaboll also there was to be a great gathering. All Thorgrim's kindred were to be there, and many others from Thorsness and those parts where Codbiter his father had lived and fished and been a notable man. Bork,

Thorgrim's brother, was one, and another Thorgrim, called Bottlenose, was another. Bottlenose was supposed to be a sorcerer, but however that may have been, he loved mischief, and made it wherever he could. He had not been long at Seaboll before he had the two pieces of Grayflanks in his hands, and the history of that sword out of Thorkel.

"A thousand pities if those parts don't come together again," he said, with his sharp little eyes shining like glowworms. "Namesake, let you and I weld a new sword out of this. Something tells me that its story is not yet out of it."

Thorgrim said that it would not hold. "You might make a spear of it—but it will never be a sword again."

"A spear that would spit a walrus!" said Bottlenose. "I see a remarkable spear. Come, let us blow up the forge and smithy it out." Half in idleness and half interested, Thorgrim helped him, and Thorkel, who would lend himself to anything except serious work, plunged into the game. They were at it all the morning, made a long and broad spear-head;

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and before the day was over it was fitted to a handle of a span long. "Grayflanks will be hungry after his fast," said Bottlenose. The other two looked at him without speaking. Then, as if the words came out of him unawares, Thorgrim said to Thorkel, "I hear that a ship has come to Aunundarfirth." Thorkel flushed and turned away.

The same tidings of a ship had come to Gisli, and troubled him in his care for the winter feast. "I would not for all the world have Vestan here this Yule," he said to Aud; "but he will come if I cannot stop him in time." He called up two of his house-carles and sent them off to Hest. He gave into the hands of one of them his half of the silver coin. "Show that to my brother-in-law," he said: "greet him well from me, and tell him that by that token I desire him to remain at home until I come to see him. Whatever you do, you must not miss him. My heart is set upon it. Fail me not."

The two men set off at once, and ran most

of the way down Hawkdale, and so to the open firth. They took boat across the water, landed at Brooksmouth, and made the best of their way to Bessastead, where they borrowed horses from the farmer and rode up Mossdale, and so crossed the watershed and looked down on Aunundarfirth. Their way was now along that firth; but meantime they had just missed Vestan, as they learned when they reached his house under Hest. He must have taken, as indeed he did, the upper road. He had two strangers with him, two men from Norway, his wife said, and had been gone six hours. There was nothing for it but to turn back and ride after him by the road he had gone.

When they got back into Mossdale and were at the top of the pass, there, about halfway down the dale, they saw a company of men riding. They pursued with the last effort of their horses, and when they could go no farther, but stopped deadbeat, they left them in the track, and ran, shouting and hailing. Just where Mossdale ends and the great heath begins, which is called Gemladale Heath, Vestan and

his companions heard them and waited until they came up.

He was told the message from Gisli, he saw the token and knew it at once. It must be serious, or Gisli would not have sent it to him —a life-and-death business. But he would not turn back. All the streams were flowing down to Dyrafirth, and he had set his heart on seeing Gisli and Aud. Danger meant little to him who lived in the midst of it; but he put the case to the two strangers in his company and advised them to fare back to Hest. "Whatever trouble there may be down there, 'tis none of your making. You will be well off with Gunnhild, and I hope to see her again before many days." The strangers agreed with him, turned their horses and went off together. Then Vestan told the house-carles to go home on foot by the crags. "And tell them at Holl how it is with me, that I am coming round by the head of the firth and shall be with them at nightfall tomorrow. And that I may make better speed," he said, "do you take between you these bales of mine, and let them bide till

I come." So he struck off across the heath to where he could get the ferry, and the two hinds went across the hills to Brooksmouth, and so home.

Gisli did not make a fuss over the news they brought him. If it must be, it must be, and that was all about it. He told Aud, who said, "We will make him keep the house. There is no need that any of them should know he is here." Gisli shook his head. "If he is bold enough to come after my warning, he is too bold to stay indoors. Besides, he has to pass by Seaboll to get here." He was very much troubled about it; but the house was full of guests just now, and they must not see an anxious host.

As for Vestan himself, he had warnings on the road. At Lambdale it was a kinswoman of his, named Luta, who kept the ferry at the firth-head. As he left her, she said, "Take care of yourself. It is not safe travelling where you are going." The whole countryside knew of the severance between Holl and Seaboll. Vestan laughed and rode on. Then he came to

the second arm of the firth, where he must ferry over to Thingere. The man in charge was one Thorhall, whom he knew well. He left his horse there and borrowed another. Thorhall asked him where he was for. "Why, into Hawkdale, to be sure," said Vestan, "to see my kinsman Gisli." Thorhall looked thoughtful; then he said, "If you please to wait a little I will ride with you to Holl."

"Nay," said Vestan, "what need of that?"

Thorhall, with a meaning look, said, "Things have changed since you were there last. Be careful of your steps up that road. That is my advice to you."

"Never fear," said Vestan, and rode on.

By the end of the day he had entered the narrow way of Hawkdale; and it was deep dusk when he saw Seaboll in front of him. The cattle were just then turning into the barton for the night. A woman in the entry with a pitchfork in her hand; Geirmund, the lad who was allotted to Thorkel when he had parted from Gisli, was driving the beasts. Vestan

reined up to let them go in, and Geirmund knew him. As he passed by the boy looked up at him and said, "Don't you come in here. Do you go on to Holl—and take care what you do when you are there." Vestan nodded his thanks, and when the cattle were by him, rode on at a footpace. The girl at the gate looked closely at him, and when he had gone, turned to Geirmund.

"Who ever was that?"

"Nay," said Geirmund, "how should I know?"

"Why, I saw you speak to him," she cried.

"You never did," said Geirmund. "I thought it was Aunund's man from Twindale."

She scoffed at him. "To carry a spear! To ride a good horse! To pass no word as he went! Make up a better tale than that, my lad."

She went on grumbling and wondering aloud who the stranger could be; and she was still talking about it when she went into the house. Thorgrim and Thorkel were both in the hall,

sitting by the great fire. Thorgrim called out to the girl, whose name was Rannveg, to tell him who rode by just now.

"I thought it was Vestan of Hest myself," she said. "He had a spear in his hand and a great cloak over him—but I thought it was he."

Geirmund stood behind her, bright-eyed. "Geirmund, who was it?" Thorgrim said, fixing him with a look; but Geirmund did not quail.

"It was dark—I could scarcely see him. Myself I thought it was Aunund's man from Twindale."

"Had he a spear? Did you see that?"

"I thought he carried a salmon-spear," said Geirmund.

Thorgrim looked at Thorkel, who stretched out his hands to the fire.

"One of you is a liar," said Thorgrim, "but I want to know who that man was. Rannveg, you shall go now to Holl, and find out whether a stranger has come there or no. Be off with you."

So Rannveg went up the dale to Holl, and

hung about there, not knowing what to do. She was afraid to go to the door, lest they should ask her what she wanted, and she not know what answer to make. So she hung about the yard with no clear intention, and there, as fate would have it, blundered against Gisli himself, who had been looking after Vestan's horse.

"How now?" said Gisli. "Who is this in my arms?" Rannveg told him. "And what do you want of us, my girl?"

She said she was going home, and had thought she might see Gudrid. Gudrid was Geirmund's sister.

"So you shall," said Gisli, and went to call her; but when Gudrid came Rannveg was not to be seen. She had run back to Seaboll as if the fiend was after her.

X

THE GIFTS

VESTAN was welcome at Holl, though Gisli shook his head over him, even as he clasped his hands. "I did all I could to keep you away—and you know I should have come over to you. Why did you not keep your promise? What could I send you of more meaning than that token?"

"I believe I was wrong to come," Vestan confessed; "but I'll tell you. I had brought over some foreign stuff as gifts to you and Aud, and I couldn't deprive myself of that pleasure. There you have it."

Aud kissed him and put her arms round his neck. "Oh, my dear, I wish you were not here."

"You are an inhospitable pair, I must say," Vestan said, still laughing. "Now, as I hate black work, let me hear what the pother is. Who needs my life? Whom have I injured?"

Then they tell him all they know, and he is

more puzzled than ever. "Asgerd? That light money? Never in your life. I may have been in her company a hundred times and never known whether she was there or not."

"She has lost her heart to you," said Aud, but Vestan, with scorn, "She has none to lose." But there it was—enmity between Seaboll and Holl ever since the fatal talk in the bower.

Vestan said presently, "Let me go over now, at once, and see Thorkel. He is a good, easy fellow. We have always been friends." But Gisli would not have it.

"You should go—and I with you—willingly," he said. "But there is Thorgrim, and I don't trust him."

"And there is Thordis too—and Thordis is an enemy." It was Aud said that.

"Why should Thordis be an enemy?" asks Vestan.

"She is my enemy, I believe," Aud replies, "and no well-wisher to you."

But Gisli, who had been brooding while Aud spoke, now said, "No, but I think she is mine. I remember when we lived in Norway how it

always was. Such friends as we had must either consort with me, or with her and Thorkel. Those two were the favourites and had the most friends; and I, whatever I did, seemed to be against them and their plans. That good-for-naught Kolbiorn was of their friends. All the evening long they would be whispering and laughing together—I knew not at what, nor would they ever tell me. Our father used to be beside himself with rage, but because those two always drew together he would not ask Thorkel to clear the dishonour Kolbiorn was doing. Therefore he made me do it. Thorkel took himself away from home for six weeks or more. I don't think he has even been the same to me since—and as for Thordis, my belief is she has never forgiven me that, and never will. And yet Kolbiorn was only fooling with her, and she knew it, and cared not a pin about him. So it is in a family often enough that one will be as it were an alien from birth, and never in the right whatever he do. This is my case, I believe."

Gisli had never spoken so freely before either

to Aud or Vestan; but now he spoke of what had been present to him all his life. He spoke sadly, but not bitterly; for it was not his nature to resent anything. Aud was not convinced. She said no more, but her locked lips showed that she held to her belief.

Vestan frowned over all this, which he found tiresome. He was himself a very friendly soul. But he presently recollected something.

"I remember now when we came back from the Thing, and it was a question of a blood-bond between us. Thorgrim first of all moved it, and then, when we had cut the turf and Gisli and I had bled in it—well, then he would not do it. I never knew why that was."

"And I did not, either," Gisli said, "save that I always believed he distrusted me and wished not to make me stronger. And now you see he has got Thorkel away from us here, having already got Thordis; so his house is stronger than mine."

"Ah, put all this foolishness out of mind," said Vestan. "Here are we all together, ready to let them alone if they wish it that way.

Come you in now and see what I have brought you."

He turned out the bales which the house-carles had brought in. There were many ells of fine stuff there, a scarf of twenty ells woven in stripes with gold and red and blue, some seventy ells of hangings for the hall of excellent workmanship, and two basons of silver-gilt which had come from Micklegarth and were beautifully hammered with knops of fruit and flowers, and bulls eating of them. The scarf was for Aud, the hangings and the gold work for Gisli and Thorkel, to be divided between them. Gisli said that now he must certainly go to Seaboll.

And go he did, the next day, leaving Vestan under promise not to quit the house. He went over alone on horseback and arrived about noon. He had the bale of goods with him.

Thorkel was lying on the hearth at full length, and Thorgrim was standing with his back to the fire. Thordis came in presently; but not Asgerd. It looked to Gisli as if his coming had been perceived and arrangements made accordingly.

Thorkel jumped up directly he saw who it was and came down to greet his brother. Thorgrim nodded his head, but made no motion. As for Thordis, she stood midway between door and high table, her head stiff, her colour high, and her blue eyes astare.

Gisli addressed himself to Thorkel only, and spoke plainly, after his fashion. You could not have detected, unless you had known him well, the love he had for his brother or his longing for the happiness which he had once had and now was lost.

"Vestan has come back from the sea," he said, "and is now at Holl. He greets you well, and since you are no longer where he hoped to find you, sends you here the gifts which he was to have made you." He opened the bale, took out the gilt bason, put it on the table, and showed the hangings by lifting up a flap of the stuff.

Thorgrim spoke from the fire. "Vestan might have brought his gifts over himself," but Gisli kept his eyes upon his brother, and Thor-

kel himself did not take up the line which was intended to help him.

Thorkel, indeed, was not happy about all this. He was still sore where he had been wounded; but the affair had been taken out of his hands, and he knew not how to regain the hold of it. He could not take these things—that he did know.

"They are very fine—I can see that. But they were gifts made to you, and you deserve them. I think you should keep them for yourself."

Thorgrim looked to Thordis as he said, "So I also should think." But Thordis only sniffed and stared at the gold bason.

Gisli took it up in his plain way. "Your meaning is that you will not have them? I am sorry for that."

"Yes," said Thorkel, "that is what I mean. I am sorry too. But how am I to repay such gifts?"

"Vestan asks no payment for gifts. That is not his way," Gisli said; and then, "I hoped you would have taken the things as they were

intended—but if you will not, they must go back with me." In a painful silence he refolded the stuff, wrapped up the bason and bestowed them in his sack. Then without a look or word more he went down the hall and out of the door, which he shut after him. They heard him unfasten his horse's tether from the ring, mount and ride out of the garth. Thorkel, who was very unhappy, went to the window and looked after him. Thordis went back to the bower, and Thorgrim, after a time of staring and silence, left the fireplace, crossed over to Thorkel where he stood and put his hand on his shoulder.

XI

THE STORM

THE storm began at midnight without warning. When they went to bed at Holl it had been a clear sky of starlight; but at midnight Gisli woke up to hear the wind roaring and the rain lashing at the side of the house. He sat up to listen to it, and thought that he had never heard such a wind before. It seemed to blow with a steady violence for some time, and then to increase suddenly to such a fury of attack that the timbers of the roof shook, and his very bed quaked under him. He was interested, but not then frightened; after every fit of fury he said to himself, "There can be no greater blast than that." But the next, when it came, was certainly greater; and so it went on.

Aud woke up and spoke to him. "What a storm! Do you think the roof will bear it?"

"I have been wondering," he said—and as he spoke the wind seemed to seize upon the house with a snarling and biting sound, as if it had caught it with teeth and claws. Then with a rending and tearing, something gave overhead, and they both felt rain upon their faces. Gisli jumped out of bed and began putting on some clothes. "I must go outside and see after the cattle," he said. "Oh, my love," said Aud, "don't go just yet."

Vestan came over to the bed. "The roof has gone," he said, "and I am being wetted. Put the lamp in a safe place and we can see what we are doing." But the lamp's flame was blown sideways as he was speaking, and went suddenly out.

"Stay here with Aud," said Gisli, "and pull the beds out of the drip. I must go out to the byres."

"I will come with you," Vestan said. But Gisli spoke shortly. "You will do no such thing. I will get all the men up and have more than enough help." He was dressed by that time, with shoes on his feet and a cloak over his

shirt and breeches. They heard him cross the hall and go to the door which led to the hinds' quarters. After a time of waiting they heard them all go out. The wind had not abated, and the rain was rather increased. Vestan haled the beds down the hall and found a dry place for them. And now they both got into bed again, and as they got warm they presently dozed and slept.

Aud awoke with a start, feeling rather than hearing somebody moving in the room. She lay with wide-open eyes waiting and listening. It was still dark in the room, but she could see the grey square of the window. The wind and rain were still furious.

Then she heard something more. "Who is there? Is that you, Gisli?" she said, and sat up. She heard a sudden rustle, as of something shot forward, and at the same moment a throttled cry, "Ah, I am stabbed!" from Vestan. She turned towards his bed and got out: as she did it, again she heard light steps in the room.

"Vestan, Vestan, what is it?" She went

shaking to his bed, and felt for him. Her hand went into something warm and wet. She shrieked. "Oh, oh, oh!" Vestan did not move.

Aud was cold all over, and her heart stood still. Then, while she waited there, the blood seemed to surge back and overload her head, till her brows throbbed with the tide of it. She left the bed and went down the hall to the men's quarters. "Is any one here? Come and help me."

A voice answered her, "I am here, mistress. I come." She knew the voice of Thord, who was called Faintheart at Holl, though he was a man of Gisli's size and strength.

"Come quickly, bring a light. There has been black work in the dark," she said.

Thord blundered with the flint and steel. His hands were shaking already. At last he came out, white-faced, with a light. "What is it, mistress? Eh, what a night, what a night!"

Aud took the lamp from him and led the way. She was desperate now, and dared to know everything. Vestan lay on his back, with

his head thrown up and sideways. A great spear, with a haft of a span's length, was driven right through his chest. Blood still flowed from the wound, but languidly. His eyes were open, but glazed and fixed. His mouth was shut, the teeth clenched.

Aud looked at him now. Pity made her half divine. She seemed to stand above the wrongs of men. "Oh, my dear, my dear, who never harmed a living creature." Then she turned to Thord, who was shuddering behind her. "Pull out the spear."

But the poor wretch durst not. "Mistress, don't ask me. I could not touch it." It was getting slowly lighter. She saw that Thord had sat down by the table. He was holding his head, and saying, "Oh, what will become of us?" Aud was suddenly angry. "Go out and find the master. Bring him to me. Go at once." Thord went out like a sheep, and she was left alone with Vestan.

She put out the lamp, which showed him horribly. In the dark you might have thought he was peaceably asleep. She would do nothing

to him till Gisli came in. She longed for Gisli to be with her.

The wind had died away, though it was still raining hard when she heard Gisli knocking his feet against the doorpost. She went to meet him. He came in, searching her face, to read the truth. He read it. "My Aud, is it that?" She fell into his arms and began to cry bitterly. He let her cry, but did not cry himself. Now that the blow had fallen he knew that he had known all along it must be so. He was not shocked by it, and not yet angry; he did not see clearly yet what remained for him to do. He drew Aud along with him and stood by the body. Then, when he remembered what Vestan had been a few hours before, and all his eagerness and zest of life—what that had been, he broke down. "My brother, my brother!" was all he could say, and he fell on his knees by the bed, and said it again and again—"My brother, my brother!"

He told her to go and fetch warm water and the grave-clouts, and while she was gone he drew out the great spear. He looked at it

closely, but did not know it. He marvelled at the length and breadth of the blade, and at the thinness and temper of the steel. Knowing much about smith's work, he saw at once that it was not such steel as men made in his day. Then, in a flash, Grayflanks, the broken sword, came into his mind; and he examined the handle of this spear. It was new—he saw it plainly. That satisfied him that the murderer was from Seaboll; but not whether it was Thorgrim or Thorkel. When Aud came back this new interest in the business absorbed him. He was able to wash and lay Vestan out as befitted, and even to take steps towards his avenging.

Aud fetched out some of the women of the house, and set them getting breakfast ready. When they had eaten, Gisli called Gudrid, his foster-child, to him, and told her that she was to go over to Seaboll and tell the news there. "And I want you to find out for me what men are about there. Can you do that?"

Gudrid nodded. "Yes, I can. But they will know the news."

"Never mind what they know or don't know,"

said Gisli, "but go in and tell them the news. Now I trust you more than any one here—so you won't fail me, I know."

Gudrid said no more—but went as she was bid. She was a sharp-faced little girl, swarthy-skinned, black-eyed, nearly fourteen years old, though she looked younger. Between her and her brother Geirmund was a good understanding kept up. Gisli knew that he could trust them both.

She came back in about an hour's time with her report, which she delivered soberly and without falter. "When I knocked at the door it was opened at once. Thorgrim Bottlenose opened it. He was in steel and had a sword in his hand. He looked surprised to see me there. I said I had a message for my cousin Thorkel; and Thorkel himself called me to come in. I went in. There were six men there, all of them armed. Thorgrim Frey's Priest was standing up before the fire; my cousin Thorkel had an ax in his hand; it stood between his knees. My cousin Thordis was not there. I heard somebody crying beyond the wall—not Thordis.

I heard Thordis scolding. They all looked at me. They waited for me to speak. I told Thorkel that Vestan had been killed in the night. He said, 'You bring bad news.' Thorgrim Bottlenose said, 'It was a night of mischief.' I said, 'Who is that crying beyond the wall?' Thorgrim said, 'Nobody is crying—and yet it were no wonder if the women mourned at such news as yours.' Then nobody spoke, but I still heard crying, and Thordis speaking in the bower.

"Thorgrim Frey's Priest spoke to Thorkel and said, 'There must be a worthy funeral of such a man. He must be laid in a great barrow. We will all go and help.' Then he said to me, 'Run you back and tell Gisli that we are coming. He has had a great loss. Tell him what I say.' I asked where Geirmund was. Thorkel said, 'He is not here. We will tell him this news. Now run back with your message.' So then I came home. I looked for Geirmund outside the house, but could not see him anywhere."

And said to Gisli, "It was Asgerd crying in

the bower." Gisli did not answer her, but remained in deep thought. Then he said to Gudrid, "It was Thorgrim Bottlenose opened the door? How did he look?"

"He showed his teeth," said the child; "and his great nose looked to be on fire."

"But when he saw that it was you—what then?"

"Then he opened his mouth, and I saw his tongue."

"Did he not say anything?"

"No. He only stared at me. I said I had a message for Thorkel, and Thorkel called me at once."

"And then you told him the news?"

"Yes, I did; but he was afraid of me."

"How do you know he was afraid?"

"Because when I told him his eyes flickered, like candles in a draught."

"And what did Thorgrim the Priest do?"

"He stood with his back to the fire, and looked hard at me. Then he looked at Thorkel. Then Thorkel said, 'That is bad news.' "

Aud said, "It was not Thorkel who did this

murder. But what Gudrid saw in him is clear enough. He knows who did it." Gisli kissed Gudrid and sent her away.

When she was gone he said to his wife, "You think it was Thorgrim's deed?"

She said, "I know it was."

Gisli knew it too in his heart. He was certain of the spear, and certain that Thorkel had not used it on Vestan. He knew his brother to the roots. He would no more kill than he would do anything else. He was incapable of action. It was one of the Thorgrims then—but which? Bottlenose had a bad name. He was well known for an outrageous dealer, for a man not always answerable for what he did. But Gisli did not believe he had done it. There was only one man who would have murdered Vestan, and that was the husband of Thordis.

XII

CONVICTION

THEY laid Vestan, full-armed, in a long boat, and oxen drew him to the hillside between Holl and Seaboll where the howe was to be heaped over him. All this was done before men came from Seaboll to help at the burying; but when they had the boat at the chosen place, and were piling the howe behind it, Gisli saw them riding over the heath. He saw Thorgrim and Thorkel riding together in front, and behind them an armed company with spears. Some of his men saw them too; but Gisli said, "Get on; get on. There is no call upon us to await them." He himself took no notice of them.

The men from Seaboll stayed at some two spear-casts distance. Thorgrim and Thorkel dismounted and came toward the burial. Still Gisli took no heed of them, so they stood rather uncertainly a little way off, watching.

By and by the heaped soil enclosed the long-boat on three sides, and Gisli was looking his last upon Vestan, and tears dimmed his eyes and made him start. He turned, and for a moment his eyes met those of the great black-bearded man beside him. It was only for a moment, for Gisli turned his at once to the dead; but Thorgrim's had not turned away.

Thorgrim spoke. "I am come, brother-in-law, to do an office to the dead."

"What more will you do?" said Gisli—but Thorgrim did not change either his tone or his purpose.

"The hell-shoes must be put on him that he may walk in safety and honour to Valhall. Now I will bind them on him as is fitting."

Gisli could not refuse him. Thorgrim was the priest of Frey and within his rights. Moreover, Thorkel was now come up and had put his hand on Gisli's shoulder.

"Do it, then," Gisli said, and Thorgrim, who had the shoes in his hand, tied them on the dead man's feet with leather thongs. Then he stood

up and said, "If these shoes loosen on his road, then say I know nothing of hell-shoes."

The earth was heaped over Vestan, and the company broke up. Thorgrim went back to his own men, mounted his horse and walked away over the heath towards Seaboll. But Thorkel stayed behind, sitting with Gisli on the side of the hill.

Gisli was glad to have him there, for he was a man who hungered for affection and who had always loved his own people more strongly than he had been loved. So when Thorkel talked gently to him, he answered him gently.

Thorkel was very gentle. "This is a terrible thing for your house," he said. "Will you not tell me how Aud does?"

"Aud never says very much," said Gisli, "but she feels it the deeplier for that. She has not wept since the first moment when she told me of what had been done. Before long I must go over to Hest with her to see Gunnhild and her sons. If she weeps with them it will be well for her."

"Yes, yes," said Thorkel. "Crying is good for women."

It was in Gisli's mind to ask whether Asgerd was still crying, and Thordis still scolding her —but he prevented himself by biting his lip.

"And you, Gisli," Thorkel went on, "how is it with yourself?"

Then Gisli let himself go. "Do you ask me that? I will tell you. I think day and night upon my slain brother. At night I dream of him. I see a snake come out of a certain house. I see him writhing along the track. He worms in beneath the door, and bites Vestan's neck. Or a wolf comes out, with bright eyes, and his tongue lolling out at the side, over his teeth. And patiently he pads the road, and with mad looks he bites Vestan's neck in the same place. Then I wake in a sweat of fear, and wonder what these things mean. Who should bite Vestan but a snake or a wolf? Who but they? Did you do it, brother?"

Thorkel shuddered. "I did not. I did not."

Gisli said, "You did not. I know you did not.

Yet I tell you that this deed was begun when you separated yourself from me."

"No, no," said Thorkel. "Say no more about it."

"I will say no more," said Gisli, "for I know no more certainly than that. But I will ask you one thing more. What have you done with the broken sword Grayflanks, which was an inheritance of woe to us from Kol the freedman?"

Thorkel showed the whites of his eyes, but turned away his head quickly. There was silence between the brothers for a while.

Thorkel was the first to recover himself. "I grieve for Aud," he said. "Tell me, does she weep for him?"

"I have told you," said Gisli. "She has wept, and she will weep again. But her tears shall be staunched when the day for staunching comes. But that is not yet." He rose to his feet. "Let us go—there is nothing more to say."

"There is this," said Thorkel, "that I should wish our love to endure."

"If you wish for that," said Gisli, "why then

did you break up our household?" He did not wait for an answer, but continued, "As for me, the love I had for you I have still. I am not given to change."

Thorkel then said, "You have a great heart, and can afford to be generous. I cannot speak as I would—this is not the time. But if you are willing to be friends with me, then I beg of you to let these troubles bide for a while. Men will be talking, and a feud is easier made than mended. Let us come together in what friendship we can—I bind you to nothing—how can I?"

"What would you have, then?" Gisli asked.

"Why," said Thorkel, "I would have sport together the rest of the winter—and, if it may be, feasts also." Gisli frowned.

"You will do well not to come to my house just now. You would not be welcome to Aud—nor would any from Seaboll unless it were Asgerd."

Thorkel said nothing about Asgerd, but again urged that there should be sports. Gisli said that if there were sports he would come—and

then they parted. He had a great deal of business on hand before he could think of ice-games. There was his roof to repair; there was a journey with Aud to Hest which must be made. Vestan had left three sons, the eldest no more than fourteen; but he had a large kindred and there would be no trouble about the estate.

But presently Thorkel, meeting him, urged the matter of sports upon him. Let them have games on the ice, he said, and a great gathering, which would stay malicious tongues, and do much towards peace. He was very earnest about it, and Gisli consented. "I will come, since you wish it," he said, "but Aud will not come, nor will I ask her—nor shall you. And I will come upon these terms only, to which I ask your attention—namely, that if it should hereafter come to pass that you are struck as I have been and feel it as cruelly, that you do for my sake what I now do for yours." Thorkel flinched at that, and looked scared; but he gave his word—"Be sure of me, brother, in any such case as that." Then Gisli prepared himself to match with Seaboll on the ice.

The game, which was the ball-game, was to be played out in a tarn in the hills, on good and hard ice. Aud said that she would not go, and Gudrid stayed with Aud; Gisli took some of the men with him, but not many. He found a great gathering from Seaboll up there: thirty or more men on the ice, with Thorgrim conspicuous in a red cloak; and on the hillside in the sun many women come to see the game. He saw Thordis at once, with the sun gleaming in her hair, and beside her was Asgerd. He did not go over to greet her, but made directly for the men banded on the ice, and was received with acclamations. Thorgrim came to him with his hand out. "We are glad to see you here. We all know that you are a champion who may cause some of us to smart for it—but it is more honour to have a fall from you than give one to a meaner man."

Gisli made no reply save, "I am ready for you."

Since he had brought so few with him it was thought unfair to match Holl against Seaboll; and after much loud talk it was settled that

Gisli and Thorgrim should choose the sides. Directly that was agreed all men drew apart and left those two in the midst of a ring. Gisli then saw his foster-child Geirmund slip through the press of men and range himself on his own side. That pleased him, and although Geirmund was of little account in such a great game as this, yet he chose him one of the first. Thorkel was chosen by Thorgrim and excused himself to Gisli. "You see how it is. He thinks he needs all the strength he can have against such a player as you. But I hope you will win the bout, and don't care who knows it."

"A game is only a game," said Gisli. "It is nothing to me to win or lose."

"Put out your strength and you will win it," Thorkel said. "I tell you Thorgrim means to best you if he can."

"We will see about it," said Gisli. The sides lined up; the ball lay in the midst. Gisli and Thorgrim were to battle over it. In this game you started the ball with your bat, and when once set going you could forward it as you would or could with the bat, with the foot,

by throwing or by running with it in your arm. So far it was like our hockey and football; but it had this great difference, that a man could hold another to prevent his getting at the ball; or he could throw him if he would. It was a fierce game, in times when bodily hurt counted for little beside hot blood.

Thorgrim was very strong, but he was heavy and slow; Gisli was light and lithe as well as strong. His body was in constant work, he was temperate and cool-headed. The only thing in which he could be called slow was in his passion. He was not easy to rouse.

The temper of the two men came out clearly in the opening battle. Thorgrim wasted himself on the effort to break down Gisli's attack. He put all he had into his own. Gisli, not at all serious, amused himself by playing with him. After a time of thrust and parry, in which Thorgrim could not once get near the ball, Gisli worked it between his legs, slipped round behind him and drove it far into the enemy ranks. Thorgrim turned to go after him, and with his shoulder would have charged him over. Gisli

saw him coming, and at the right moment darted forward. Thorgrim fell heavily, and was slow to rise. Gisli went back at once to help him up—but Thorgrim would not have any help. However the game swayed after this it was noticeable that his greatest efforts were directed against Gisli.

The first half of the game was declared for Gisli's party by three goals, and he began the second part by a clear advantage. Gisli drove the ball through and followed up his hit-off by a charge in which he was well backed by his side. After that in the fortunes of the day a man of Thorgrim's side got the ball and threw it to his chief. Thorgrim ran with it, and ran well, but Gisli bore down upon him like the wind, caught and threw him. The ball left his arms and flitted away over the ice; Gisli would have run for it, but Thorgrim caught him round the body and held him. They wrestled together; and now the heat latent in Gisli caught fire from his adversary, and they wrestled in grim earnest. For a time they swayed or rocked in conflict; but Gisli's hold went lower and lower until he

felt the leverage he wanted. All of a sudden then he constricted his arms and, lifting Thorgrim over his shoulder, pitched him head-first into the ice. For a while he lay there as if he were stunned, and many of the players gathered about him. Gisli also stood and watched. Then Thorgrim rose to his knees, white with rage, and red with blood from a wound in his forehead. His hands were cut too, and both bleeding. He shook the blood out of his eyes and peered at Gisli. Rage vibrated in his tones. "You can play games, and throw with the best," he said; "I'll not deny it. But I see down there the prize I strove for, and it was well worth a fall."

Gisli saw the direction of his blood-smeared eyes, and turned to look at the barrow of Vestan dark upon the hillside in the growing dusk. "I see what you see, Thorgrim," he said. "It will be long before I see anything else." With that his spirit caught hold of his body and drove it to savagery. He stooped to the ball, picked it up and flung it at Thorgrim. It hit him full in the face. Down he went again on his back.

Then Gisli turned to Thorkel. "Brother, shall we finish the game?"

"My head," said Thorkel, "you have finished it indeed."

"Not yet," said Gisli.

XIII

GRAYFLANKS GOES HOME

FOR the full circle of another year Gisli hid his conviction in his heart and did nothing. Aud, watchful, left him alone. The melting of snow, the spring sowing, lambing, hay-time, corn-harvest went round again. Thorgrim, who had ridden the hill-ways armed and attended, now became more careless how he went. Thorkel in soft raiment still sunned himself in front of Seaboll, or walked the water-side at Thingere and gossiped with them who worked there. Thordis at the end of that summer knew herself with child. Asgerd, who had grown thin and was pinched in the face, nevertheless had forgotten her sorrow. She had no child, and consoled herself by saying that she was no worse off than Aud. If driven into a corner by Thordis, she would grow snappish, and say that the Sours were a barren stock.

"See Aud with no child, see me. There is a curse upon your house, I do believe." Thordis cared nothing for that now that the child within her had quickened. She laughed richly and hugged herself. So the sun went round again, and after harvest the nights begain to encroach upon the light; the heavy mists drooped over the mountain-tops and stayed there all day; by and by the wind began to moan in the valley and drive the leaves out; it turned cold o' nights; one morning you saw the hills clear of fog, and the first powder of snow upon them. All was made ready at Holl, and Gisli said that they must think about the winter feast —for in those days the first and the last of winter were celebrated with sacrifice and feast in honour of Frey.

However, any feasting which might be done at Holl was likely to be outdone at Seaboll, where Thorgrim, who was Frey's priest, would be sure to make a gathering of men from afar. His chief estate lay at Thorsness, many valleys south of Hawkdale, where his brother Bork Fat saw to the management and had his two sons

in fostership. Thereabouts also Eyjolf, his kinsman, lived and was a great man. These two with their clansmen would come, and Thorgrim Bottlenose, the Wizard and man of mischief, and many more. There had been for the year long no intercourse to speak about between Holl and Seaboll. Gisli had never been into Thorgrim's house, but he had met Thorkel on the waterside now and then, and had behaved to him as he had always done. Asgerd and Aud had met also at the house of Thorkel of Alvidra, at a wedding, and Asgerd had cried as she had been kissed by Aud. She had asked Aud to kiss her, who otherwise would not. Then Geirmund, who was a fine lad of sixteen, dark and shapely, had come up at whiles to see his sister Gudrid—but that was all the commerce. Just before the winter began Gisli met Thorkel, and heard that there was to be a feast at Seaboll, with sixty guests there. "The house will be full, and every man of us drunk for three days or four," he said, and Gisli believed it.

Shortly after that Geirmund came to Holl and

asked for Gisli. He generally went round the house to the women's side and looked about for Gudrid, who took him into the bower; but this time he asked for Gisli, who overheard him and called him in.

He came up the hall slowly and stood there watching Gisli at work upon a pair of snow-shoes. After a while, seeing he said nothing of his errand, Gisli asked him about it. "Tell me what calls you here," he said.

Geirmund coloured up finely and did not know how to begin. "Speak out, man," says Gisli; "no one will hurt you here."

"Nay, it's not so at all," the boy said; "but the errand mislikes me."

Gisli left off his work and sat on the table. "Now you must tell it."

So Geirmund had to tell his story. He said that they were all busy at Seaboll making the house ready for the guests who were to come at nightfall. The floors were bestrewn with rush, and they were hanging the hall. Thordis had said how well those rich hangings which Vestan had offered would look; and Thorgrim

thought of it, and then asked Thorkel to send and borrow them. Thorkel said he would not. "It would only be for a day or two," Thorgrim said, but he would not hear of it.

Then Thorgrim said, "Well, I will send for them—we can but try," and "he called me up," said Geirmund, "and told me to go over here and fetch them. I said, 'I have other things to do—and I don't care to ask Gisli such a thing'; and that made Thorgrim angry. He cuffed me across the chops, and said, 'Go then with that to the good.' I said, 'If I must, I must, but that shall come back again if I have my way.' So much I said to him, and then I went."

Gisli looked over at Aud, who was at the window. "What do you say? Will you let the things go?"

She did not turn her head. "I would give them nothing but their deserts," she said. "It is no use asking me about it." Then he asked Geirmund, "Does Thorkel wish for them, think you?"

Geirmund said, "He was ashamed to ask you, and so was Thordis. But they both want them, I know."

"That is enough," Gisli said. "The things shall go." He folded them up then and there, wrapped them in a cloth, and put the bale over Geirmund's shoulder, saying, "I will walk with you a part of the way."

He walked with him to the very gate of the Seaboll garth, and stopping there, he said, "Now, Geirmund, I have done you a good turn, and may do you a many more. But now you shall do me a good turn, for they say that one hand washes another. What I ask of you is to push back the bolts of the doors tonight. By that means the cuff on the head you had may come home."

Geirmund's eyes blinked as he looked over the country. Then he looked Gisli straight in the face and asked him, "Will that bring harm to Thorkel?"

"It will not," said Gisli.

"It shall be done," he said.

Snow began to fall at dusk, just as the guests came in. It fell in soft, thick, idle flakes, with no kind to carry it, but without ceasing. At midnight, when the household went to bed, Gisli looked out of doors, and saw a uniform surface of white—nearly a feet deep in the garth; and still the flakes were floating down. He went back into the house, took Grayflanks the spear out of the chest where it had lain since he threw it there all shaggy with Vestan's blood. Looking at the blade, he saw that blood still there, black and hard, like dry glue. He put his blue cloak on, hid the spear in it, drew the hood over his head, and called to Aud in a quiet, plain voice. She came out to him, and stared.

"Are you going out—now?"

"Yes," he said. "I must look to Thorkel Rich's horse. I forgot his fodder, and heard him stamping just now. Do you come with me and lock the gate after me. Then watch until I come back, and let me in again. I shan't be gone long."

She looked earnestly at him, holding a lamp in her hand; she looked for some time, but he

did not seem to notice. "Are you ready?" he asked her. She went out without answering, and came back with a cloak over her head. "Quite ready now."

She let him out by the women's door, and once more he said, "Lock after me, and keep a good watch. I shan't be long gone." Then he went down the snow-slope towards the river, and she knew that he was not for foddering horses. She was a grave, silent woman who seldom betrayed either joy or sorrow. She locked the door, blew out the lamp, and sat down, folded in her cloak.

Gisli could see his way clearly, but had to tread carefully, because the snow had hidden the rocks which strewed the river-bank. He walked down-river until he came to Seaboll, then turned up, and got over the wall of the barton and into the byre where the cows were. As he had built the house himself and knew every turn and angle of it, he could go straight to his mark. He found the small door which led from the byre into the storehouse—unbolted. From the store-

house he passed into the kitchen, from thence into the hall. At the entry he stood still, listening.

Two small lamps threw a local light and showed dim forms stretched in sleep; he heard heavy breathing on all sides; but no one stirred. For a time he stood where he was in deep attention; then, having studied the way he wished to go, he put his hand upon the nearest lamp and extinguished it. There was now scarcely any light at all, and he was about to move; but just then a sleeper turned, and he waited. He saw an arm stretch upward, a hand feel its way up the lamp, and then, as the flame was pinched out, total darkness. He moved forward with great care, but not very slowly, found a curtain and passed under it, found a bed in the wall and stood beside it. The occupants of it—for there were two—were fast asleep. He put out his hand and touched the nearest. He felt a warm and soft breast, and withdrew his hand at once. He had done a senseless thing; his hand was icy. He put it into his shirt against his own

skin, and waited. Thordis stirred and said, "What do you want? Do you want me?" But Thorgrim still breathed heavily. "I thought you touched me," Thordis said, but no more. Thorgrim had not woken; he was probably heavy with drink.

When his hand was warm Gisli leaned over the bed and touched Thorgrim on the shoulder. Thorgrim awoke and turned towards his wife. Then Gisli with the same hand pulled back the bed-clothes. With the other he drove the spear through Thorgrim's chest and pinned him to the bed. Thorgrim groaned horribly—"Oh, you hurt, you hurt!" he said, and struggled and groaned again. Thordis shrieked—"He is killed! Wake up!" But Gisli was in the store-room before any one knew what was said. They were all drunk, as he had expected.

Gisli reached home by the way he had come. It was still snowing steadily, and there would be no footprints. Aud opened for him, and together they went to their bed. He kicked off

his frozen shoes, took off his cloak, and she saw he was in his shirt and linen drawers. One look between them told her all she wanted to know.

XIV

AFTERTASTE

THERE was wild confusion in the dark at Seaboll, but Geirmund had been able to bolt the doors before the light came. It had been he who extinguished one of them when Gisli was in the hall. Awakened out of drunken stupor, trampled or trampling in the crowded hall, men did foolish and even horrible things, while Thordis held on to the spear and shrieked or laughed insanely.

But as soon as there was a light to see by, and Thorkel had seen the dead man, he knew the spear. He had his wits about him, while perhaps no other man there had, unless you reckon Geirmund as a man. Quick as thought he had wrenched it out of the body, and then, when Thordis was lying across her dead husband, he had secreted the thing, being afraid lest Bottlenose should see and know it, and make further mischief.

The belief got about that the murderer was in the house, and men looked scared at each other. The thought sobered them quicker than anything else could have done. The possibility of being suspected made every man guarded in what he said or did.

Bork, a brother of the dead, took the lead in everything. He was a fat, red-headed man with small blue eyes in a broad and freckled face. Known to be rich, it was plain that he intended to be the richer for the loss of the head of his family. In the judgment of more than one in the house he had already looked appetently at Thordis. Bottlenose thought so. "Our neighbour will console the widow and himself at a stroke, you will see," It might be so, but Thorgrim had left his mark behind him.

It was Bottlenose who was the first to say that the news must go up to Holl. Eyolf, who was near of kin to the dead—a lean and grey man with a wintry smile—said that he would go with him. "And we must go well-accompanied, moreover, less they should think up there that all the power of our house is thrown

down with our kinsman." They went up the valley a company of thirty spears, and Thord Faintheart saw them coming and pelted home scared to death. Gisli and Aud were still in bed when he came in out of breath and told them what was afoot. "Master, a force of armed men in the valley! And they report bad news."

Gisli heard him calmly. "Let me rest for once in my life," he said. He heard hoofs thudding in the snow even as he turned to sleep again. Aud could not pretend to sleep; but she followed her husband's example as best she could, and lay still, with very wide-open eyes.

Thorkel and Eyolf came into the hall and Thorkel himself came through to the end in the wall. The first thing he saw was a pair of shoes, snow-encrusted, lying beside the bed. He turned red in the face, and pushed them out of sight underneath. By that time Gisli pretended to awaken, to turn and recognize Thorkel.

"Brother, good morning. What news brings you here?"

"The worst," said Thorkel. "Our kinsman Thorgrim has been slain in his bed."

Gisli sat up and looked at him.

"He has not been long following Vestan," he said.

Aud sat up in bed. Her hair was about her face and shoulders. Her eyes were tragic. Thorkel thought he saw fear in them, and an asking for pity.

"He is a heavy loss to us, which will be felt all over the country. We may be sure that his death will be avenged." Then he waited for Gisli to say something, but as he said nothing at all, he went on. "His kinsman Eyolf is here with us. Would you wish to see him?"

"Why should I wish to see him?" said Gisli. "I will get up and make myself ready, and then I will go down to Seaboll. It is only right that Thorgrim should have honourable burial. I will do my part of that, just as he came hither to see me honour my own dead. If you wait for me now I will go up with you."

"I will wait," said Thorkel, and went back to the hall where Eyolf was smiling away

bleakly to himself. As he smiled his pale eyes were for ever on the search. Guests at Holl came blinking from their beds and gathered about the two armed visitors. It is hard to say how ill news is known: it is felt in the air rather than learned by word of mouth. To one sensitive of bloodshed, the heavy silence, the constraint, the breathless air of the chill morning in the hall were eloquent tongues. Presently the grave Aud came out of her chamber, and served the visitors with horns of warm drink. By now the peat fire was alight.

Thorkel went to the hearth and warmed himself. Cold and excitement had set his teeth chattering. He wished to speak to Aud, but was afraid to show himself to her as he was. Eyolf, however, had something to say. He looked at Aud over the rim of his horn, after he had blown a half-circle into the froth. Even when his mouth was hidden in a horn you could see that he still smiled by the furrows in his cheeks.

"Mistress," he said, "that's a true saying that ill work breeds."

Aud did not avoid his eyes. "It is as true," she said, "as that good work breeds."

"And how do you look upon last night's work?" There was knowledge to be seen in the man's eyes and chilly grin, but she did not seem to recognize it. "It may be that the dead man knows most about that," she said; "and the dead man's wife may know something."

Then Eyolf took a long pull at his horn. "Ah," he said, when he had sucked his moustaches clean, "ah, and what Thordis does not know she will find out. Be sure of it."

Aud said, "So would I do in her place; and when I had found out I should keep it to myself."

Gisli came up to them cloaked and shod with high boots. He looked from one to the other, then missed his brother and searched for him. He saw him facing the fire, his hands held out, and went down the hall to him. "I am ready, brother."

Thorkel showed the whites of his eyes. He was too much affected to speak at first; and when he did speak his voice was hoarse. "Are

you indeed coming with us? Are you for putting your head into the wolf's den?"

"I shall see my sister," Gisli said, but Thorkel burst out in an eager whisper.

"You have none. You will see a woman beside herself."

"If I do," said Gisli, "I shall see what I did not see when Aud's brother Vestan lay here stabbed to death." Thorkel looked wildly into the fire; his forehead was drawn up in wrinkles; his eyes seemed staring out of their sockets.

"Different natures—what is that to the purpose? But the spear has come back—and she knows it."

"Does she know who brought the spear here?" Gisli asked him. "If she knows that, she knows all. Come, be a man, and let us be off."

They went out, a silent three from a silent company, and took the way of Seaboll. There was a track in the snow of many feet, but all setting toward Holl. The snow had fallen after Gisli's homefare, and covered his tracks of going and returning.

When they came into the hall at Seaboll they found Thorgrim laid on a trestle bier, armed and in his red cloak. Asgerd crouched at his feet, Thordis stood at his head. She was very pale, with a burning patch on each cheek. She turned to Gisli the face of a foe. The hall was full of men, and all were armed.

Gisli went up to the bier and looked unmoved upon the dead man's face. "A great chieftain lies there," he said, "and it is ill to see. I am come, sister," he said, and turned to the fierce woman, "to say to you that I grieve for you, as I daresay you grieved for me in my affliction. What your man did for my dead I will do for yours. You will raise a barrow over him in his ship, and I will help you with all I have. So he did to Vestan, so I will do to him."

Thordis said, "Do you dare come here to say so?"

Gisli said, "I have never been afraid to do right."

"If I were a man those would be your last words," said Thordis, and looked meaningly and directly to her armed guests.

But she looked in vain; none of them stirred.

"If you were a man, Thordis," Gisli said, "you would not talk like that. There is no man here would touch me unarmed."

Thorkel said at once, "No, no. Thordis is talking wildly. Nevertheless, brother, you had best leave us just now. When the burying is to be you shall be forewarned. We are obliged to you for your proffer of service. A great man lies there, the priest of Frey, and a man not likely to be deserted by his friends. Nevertheless we shall be glad to see you when the time comes."

Gisli nodded his head, and turned away. Nobody moved to follow him, and Thordis took the hint.

He went home to his guests, but avoided them and called Aud to him. She followed him into their chamber. He took her hand and made her sit on the bed beside him. "Heavy trouble is about us," he said. "I did what was right; there was no way out of it—but Thordis means my death."

Aud's grey eyes were heavy with care. "Be-

tween us we may avoid it," she said. "Nobody knows that you did it."

"She knows," said Gisli, "though not certainly. She will ask me straight, and I shall not deny it."

"How should you?" Aud said, "or why should you? He killed my brother, and your blood-kinsman. What else should he have?"

Gisli said, "I am sick of such deeds. Have we men no better things to do? Is not the whole earth ours? Have we nothing to do in it?"

Aud said, "If it pleases you, we will go away from here. We will take Gudrid with us and begone."

"There is no escape from fate, my love," said Gisli. "I won't go away if I can help it, but will do what should have been done before—sue Thorgrim's folk at the Thing for Vestan's slaying, and set off the one death against the other."

"You must do that at once," said Aud, but he told her, No.

"I have said that I will be at the burial, and

so I will. They will think I fear them, and I won't have that."

Aud stared at the fire. "You must do as you think right. You have always done that, and I shall never stand in your way."

He kissed her for a true woman.

XV

PASSION OF THORDIS

BORK, the brother of Thorgrim, was called the Fat, and with justice; but a man may be fat and yet have a high mind. The Codbiter's sons had always held themselves of good account, for they had been great people in Thorsness, with the Priesthood in the family, and a large clan owning them for chieftains. He had made up his mind before the burial to two things, but wanted one much more than the other. One was to avenge his brother's death. He knew that he must do it. The whole clan would look to him for it, since until Thorgrim's son Stein was come to manhood, the chieftainship and the Priesthood were both vested in him. He knew he must do it, but at the same time he knew it would be a troublesome and a long business. He talked to Eyolf about it. "If this man here, Thorkel, were anything more than a pet calf it would be easy,"

he said. "Suppose he had the spirit of his sister the widow—it would be done at the burial."

"It would have been done this morning," said Eyolf, "when he was there in the midst of us."

"Yes, yes, I know that," said Bork; "but that would have had a bad appearance—for we weren't sure that he was the man."

"Are we sure now?"

"Not yet; but we shall be when we are at the howe-side. Thordis will ask him. He is not the man to deny it."

"Well," said Eyolf, "and say that he owns to it—will you slay him then and there?"

"No," said Bork, "that is not my plan. My plan is to wait until the Thorsness Thing and get him made outlaw."

"Will that suit the widow?"

"I hope," said Bork, "that she won't be a widow by that time."

That was his second determination. He was in love with Thordis, and had been so for many a day. He saw his way to a handsome wife and a fat inheritance, or at least the handling

of it, for he knew that Thordis was with child by his dead brother. Certainly, he wasn't sure that she would have him; but he hoped to work upon her feelings by promising requital for the slaughter, and judged she would go far to be sure of that.

"Now, Eyolf," he said, "I count upon you to help me in this affair. If Gisli is the man I believe him to be we must go slowly to work, or he will outwit us. I know he passes for a slow-minded man; but let me tell you that no man is so handy at all manner of work as Gisli is without also being a man of shrewd mind. Now the first thing he will do will be to denounce the slayer of Vestan, you will see. We must so manage it that we have him outlawed before he can come at that."

"You can do that," Eyolf said. "At Thorsness you have the Thing in your hollow hand. I advise you to get Bottlenose to work. Let his magic forbid houseroom to the man, and we are bound to run him down if he take to the woods. He too will leave a handsome widow behind him. I like those dark, proud, quiet

women myself. They bank their fires and last the longer."

"Ha," said Bork. "Give me a roaring blaze."

They took Bottlenose apart and talked to him a long time. He made a fuss, said that the dooms they wanted of him would be dangerous and costly. He must have so much and so much, or he would not touch it—and so on. Bork bled freely to get his way, and Bottlenose went to work. He gathered all the herbs and roots needful, built up a great fire, put on his cauldron, made an altar and a high seat and moved round it, muttering spells and devilries. He made a great stench on the fellside, but said it was all accomplished. "No man," he said, "will house the slayer more than once, and very few so much as once."

They said, "Will he be slain on land or in the water?" He said, "On land."

They asked, "Will there be any man beside him when he fall?" He said, "There will not."

They asked, "Will he make a great defence?"

He said, "He will—and it will be a long one—and many will be sorry that the thing was ever set on foot."

They asked, "Who will be sorry?" He said, "Why, I shall be sorry—and that first of all."

The burial was next day, and Gisli went to it with all the guests in his house, who made a good appearance, though nothing near so numerous as the company that came from Seaboll. None of the women came. Thorgrim was laid in his boat on the side of the hill, and the ground heaped round him as the manner was. Hell-shoes were on his feet, not of Gisli's tying; but Gisli remembered how the dead man had bound them on Vestan's feet, and grew excited as he thought of it. What he did was very unlike him—and yet he did it. When the earth was breast-high round the ship he went down to the river below and picked out a great rock from the bed. With that on his shoulder he climbed the hill, climbed the mounded earth and stood atop of it, looking down upon the dead. All men stayed in their shovelling to

stare at him. "Now hold off your work, all of you," he said, "while I make fast that ship with a mooring-stone." So said, he lifted the rock from his shoulder and swung it up over his head. Down it fell with a crash into the hold of the ship, and men felt the earth shake under them. "Tell me that I know nothing of mooring a ship, if any weather stir that stone," he said. Then he turned away and came down the heaped earth, and left the place, none caring to stop him.

Bork looked at Eyolf, who was looking at him. He pursed his lips together, and nodded his head. Eyolf nodded his head too, grinning playfully. Thorkel, who was scared, and looked it, went after Gisli and overtook him.

"Brother, be careful what you are about," he said. "You are going where I may not be able to help you."

"Small help have you ever given me, brother," Gisli said.

"I did you a service the other day," said Thorkel, "when I came to Holl with the news, and found you in bed."

"What was that?"

"At the foot of the bed was a pair of shoes srow-crusted, with the ice half-melted on them. I kicked them under the bed before Eyolf came in. And one other service I did you."

"Name it."

"It was I who took the spear out of Thorgrim's chest, and knew it again, and hid it away. Good for you, maybe, that Thordis did not see that."

"I thank you," said Gisli. "Yet it was true the spear went home to who forged it."

"Brother," said Thorkel, "upon my head that was not I."

"Nay," said Gisli, "I don't think it. Did I not say that it went home?"

"I can't answer you that—I can't answer you. But I beg you to be careful. Our sister Thordis is with child. Women, you know, are not easily dealt with at such times."

"I have no dealings with women," Gisli said shortly. "With men I shall know how to deal."

"Yet in this matter," said Thorkel, "there will be one woman to reckon with."

"Then," said Gisli, "there will be two."

"It snowed that night, and next day a great marvel was reported at Seaboll, and heard of at Holl, too. It was said that Thorgrim's howe was untouched by the snow. Frey, they declared, had sheltered his priest.

Gisli said he should go out there to see this wonderful thing, and Aud went along with him.

It was true—as had been reported—that the great mound of raw earth stood up dark out of the white field. It was wet and smoking, but no snow upon it anywhere. Aud's hold tightened upon Gisli's arm, and her lips muttered, "What have we done?" but not audibly.

Gisli did not hear, or did not answer her; his attention was occupied elsewhere. He had seen a woman kneeling beside the mound, and knew her for Thordis. He had seen what she was at, and had swerved immediately from the straight road and put the mound between Aud and what he had seen.

But Aud could not be concealed, and Thordis would not. She came round the barrow, her face crimson and sweaty, her eyes haggard

and wild. They saw that her arms were grimed to the elbows with soil, and her hands bleeding. Aud clung to Gisli at the apparition; he stiffened but did not attempt any more to avoid his sister.

Thordis was beside herself. She had forgotten her grudge, her more than suspicion; she could think only of the smoking mound.

"You see—he lives, he lives. His heat breaks through. Help me now to have him out before he die. To work, to work!"

The woman raved, and ran back to her work; fell on her knees and scrabbled at the earth like a dog. Aud was moved with pity and went directly to her. "Come away, Thordis. It is not so—you are mistaken. It cannot be. Come with me—I will take you home." She put a hand on her shoulder.

A sudden change shook Thordis, who stopped her mad work and looked dreadfully at Aud. "You!" she said. "You, who are at the root of all my troubles! You with your snug love, who got and gave without asking! Go away quickly, you, lest I do you harm." She stared

about, as if collecting herself, then looked at the hole she had made in the mound and began at it afresh. Now Gisli felt that he must do something. This sight outraged him, and perhaps he knew not what he said.

"Sister, give over, for Thorgrim is dead."

She took no notice, but went on with fury, panting and crying, at her horrid task.

"Give over, I say. The man is dead. The same spear which slew my blood-brother has slain him. I know where it went, for I drove it in."

Then Thordis stayed her work and looked at her brother. "It was your icy hand I felt on my breast?"

Gisli bowed his head. Thordis gave over, and stood up. "I haven't worked for nothing. I know what I wanted to know."

Aud pulled Gisli by the sleeve. "Come away," she said, "you have done yourself harm enough." Thordis put her hands on her hips and glared at Aud.

"No," she said, "he has not done himself harm enough. He has left some for me to do."

Then she looked at Gisli, and he thought he had never seen hatred in any eyes before. "From the beginning you have measured yourself with me; from the beginning been my enemy. Look to the end now—for there can only be one end. You thought you had but one enemy left when you slew Thorgrim like a traitor in the night. You were wrong. You had two."

She touched herself, and they both knew what she meant. Aud shrank from her as from a demon, and Gisli took her away and left Thordis standing there.

XVI

DISCOVERIES

THORDIS went home to Seaboll in a flame of discovery; she found Bork sitting by the great fire. "Up with you, Bork," she said; "I have it from the man's own mouth that he slew your brother."

Bork looked long at her without speaking, then beckoned her nearer, and made her sit beside him. "Softly fares the best," he said. "We have many things to settle before we come to that."

"Why, what would you have?" she said.

Then Bork said, "There will be your brother Thorkel to speak with. And we must think how far this feud will be carried on—and by whom. Thorkel, as I understand him, will never work in the open against his brother Gisli. And supposing that he did so—do you think he would sit here overshadowed by such

a feud as Gisli's wife's folk would have against him? He is not a man of that sort, but a man of peace and good-fellowship, who loves to stand well with his neighbours. And next I come to myself. Well, I will be frank with you. I belong to another country, where I stand well enough. Until Thorgrim's sons are of age I hold the tutorship of their lands and gear; but all that is far away from here, and when once I am there it is as if Gisli and Hawkdale never existed. Moreover it can't be denied that Gisli was provoked into what he did —moreover, once more, that he is your blood brother. Therefore, you see, there is much to be thought of."

She hardly heard him to the end, but he took her by the wrist and held her to her seat.

"Gently, my dear, hear me out. Let me ask what is to become of you if I carry this feud to the end you desire, and set the whole country alight thereby. You carry a child of Thorgrim's; you have a fair portion here. Who will defend you in it? Thorkel? Will he satisfy you?"

She fidgeted in her seat. "You know what I think of Thorkel. I have not asked his help, but yours." He looked closely at her.

"And if I grant it you freely and fully—what then?"

Now she was thoughtfully looking into the fire.

"What do you ask, then, in return?"

"I ask yourself, Thordis, and without you I can do nothing." She frowned into the fire, tossing her foot. Bork put his arm round her and drew her to himself.

"Marry me, Thordis, and your quarrel is mine to the end."

She looked at him, curiously and more than half irritated at the triviality of men. "Why, what worth am I to you? Or what worth are you to me, if such desires move you?"

Bork laughed and pulled her close. "I think a fair woman alive is worth many a man dead and buried. I am in love with you now, and have been this long time. Let us make a match of it and you shan't repent it."

"Have me if you must," said Thordis, "but

don't fail me, or it will be you who repent it."

Thorkel was told when he came in, and Eyolf too. Once his desire was moved, it was not long before he was satisfied; and then, keeping his word, he proposed to his brother-in-law the burning of Holl. Thorkel was strongly against it—indeed, for once, he took a line of wisdom and said he would have nothing to do with it. He said that at Thorsness Bork and his family would have it all their own way, and that nothing could prevent the outlawry of Gisli. Once made an outlaw, his slayer would go scatheless; the feud would die with his death, and the country be at peace. Bork, as a fact, was only too ready to agree with him, and proposed that Seaboll should be sold, and that all their household should move out to Thorsness, where the outlawry should be pursued on the instant. That was long debated, for Thordis, who was for the burning, held out against any milder measures; but she was overborne by the others and forced to be content.

Thorkel came to see Gisli very early in the morning. He seemed scared out of his wits to

be there, would not sit down, or allow the door to be shut.

"I should not be here," he said. "These things are no concern of mine. I am a fool to put my hand so close to the fire—but I must warn you to look to yourself."

Gisli was strangely impassive. "If I do look to myself, it will be for the first time in my life. But what am I to look for?"

Thorkel narrowed his eyes. "Thordis has told the kinsmen what you told her. The slaughter is declared then. What will you do?"

Gisli said, "If I look to you first, as my brother, it would not be strange." That put Thorkel into a stew.

"You cannot look to me. I had no part in it—I will not be dipped. I promise nothing but warning—and that is more than convenient. I advise you to be out of this country—and with speed. No man can receive you here. Bottle-nose has seen to it."

"Has he indeed?" said Gisli; "and what has he done to that end?" Thorkel told him of the

enchantments and of the spells laid. Gisli laughed, though Aud did not.

"Bork marries Thordis," Thorkel said, "and we shall flit from here to Thorsness. They will sue out your outlawry, and you will be any man's mark. I tell you this at risk of my life —but I am your brother after all, and can't forget it."

Gisli said, "This is a great thing you do for me, brother, to let me know that I am to die." Thorkel grew hot, and the hotter in that he felt the justice of the rebuke.

"You forget what you have done to me—to kill my brother-in-law and partner—a defenceless man—in his sleep, too——"

"And did he forget nothing? Did he not slay my blood-brother and brother-in-law? And for what reason? For none at all."

Thorkel cast about him. "He loved my wife —he was her lover——"

"And if he had been, that may have been reason good for you, but was it reason for Thorgrim to slay him?" said Gisli. Thorkel had nothing to say.

"And if Thorgrim slew him without quarrel, should not Thorgrim pay the debt?" Again he had nothing to say.

"But the charge is a lie," Gisli said, "and you must know it well. Asgerd was brainsick when she said she loved him, but never so brainsick as to say that he had ever looked at her or thought about her. That part of the lie was not hers. Was it yours?"

"No, no," said Thorkel. "I never thought it."

Gisli's eyes burned. "Get out of this, you who do your slaughters at second hand, and let me not see you again. You make me despair of long legs and broad shoulders which carry such a pin-point of heart between them." Rage gave him a force he was not aware of. He took Thorkel by the shoulders, turned him about and pushed him to the door. At the door he gave him a sounding kick behind which sent him hurtling into the snow. There he left him and came back to Aud. "I feel the better for that," he said; but she was gravely

troubled and took no pleasure in Thorkel's discomfiture.

Aud said, "The end is at hand. They will be too many for you, for they are bitter and you have no anger against them. The war goes to him whose rage sustains him. Now do you heed me. Sell Holl as soon as may be, and let us go up to Hest. My brother's sons are too young to help us; but I have brothers-in-law, three of them, all good men as you know. I will send them to Thorsness to plead their brother's slaughter against the outlawry. We must lose no time, for I see now that Thordis will lose none."

Gisli heard her, but seemed to take no notice of what she said. "The strokes follow each other like steps in the snow. What can I do against Fate?" Then Aud said in a low, hurt voice, "Am I nothing?" and he looked up surprised, and saw her flush to cheeks and trembling mouth.

"My love, you are all I have left. Why do you ask such things?"

"Because," said she, "we have yet a little time, and it will be something to remember for who is left." She spoke now in a very low voice, and would not look at him. But he looked at her, and saw her more beautiful than she had ever been before. Love then, within the shadow of death, glowed in this temperate, strange man—but he had caught light from his wife. His eyes burned, he had nothing to say; but he rose up and stood over her. His hand touched her shoulder, and he could feel her tremble at his touch. So they stayed for a while with beating hearts; and then Aud arose and gave herself into his arms. He led her away.

At night he said, "Now I have wedded thee a second time, and it behooves us to make the best of what days remain to us. I arise in the morning to provide for thee, my love, and for thy sake I will live."

Aud clung to him. "If I have put heart into you," she said, "to have regard to yourself, I have done something."

"The heart you have put in me, my heart, is your own." Aud laughed.

"O foolish one, and do you think that I gave you my heart tonight?"

He said, "I have reason to think it."

XVII

OUTLAWRY

NOTHING was done in a hurry because, as Gisli had guessed, Bork was busy about other things. He married Thordis and assumed control of her share of Seaboll; then Thordis lay in and was delivered of a boy, afterwards famous by the name of Snorro. Had it not been for that last great affair of hers, she would have goaded Bork into violence against Holl, or at least have driven him hard. But Bork was a slow-moving man, and at bottom a peaceable-minded man. He knew it was his business to slay Gisli, but did not at all wish to be slain himself. He was determined on the outlawry, and had charged Eyolf to see to it that nothing was done at Thorsness which might impede it. Eyolf, grey, lean-faced, withered-looking, was rather redoubtable down there, and a great hand at lawsuits. His stretched

smile, which never failed him, depressed his opponents. The result of it was that when Vestan's brothers, Helgi, Sigurd and Vestgeir, came to the Thing and craved redress for their brother's murder, Eyolf was ready for them with a great host, and fairly overawed the assembly. He had little trouble in getting the case held over until the next Session, showing that Bork and Thordis must both be present and both heard in mitigation of judgment. The brothers could do nothing against him, so rode home, and reported themselves at Holl.

The better part of the year passed over, and Holl was sold. When the crops should be in Gisli was prepared to flit, but he lingered on as long as he could, happy in his recreated and quickened love, asking nothing better of life than to be with Aud. He saw nobody from Seaboll and knew nothing of what was doing there. It had been better for him if he had kept his eyes upon his enemies, but that was not his way. In his heart he knew very well that they would get him in the end; his only concern was to put that end as far from him

as possible. Loving Aud as he did, while every time he clasped her might be the last, he was thankful in his heart that it had been given him. He told her nothing of it; but she knew it perfectly well, and was content to live so, seeing no other way was possible. So they kept the edge of life keen and sharp.

The news fell suddenly. Thorkel stood once more on the threshold of Holl. Aud was in the hall, heard his footsteps, saw his shadow at the door, and went out to him. He looked older. "Well?" she said.

"Not well," said he. "I have no reason to expect a welcome here, yet I am come to warn my brother, and at the risk of my good name too."

"Gisli is abroad," Aud said. "You will find him in the uplands."

"I cannot go there after him," Thorkel said. "I wish he were here."

"You may trust me with your news," Aud told him, "or if it must be, I will send for him. Gudrid shall run up and fetch him home."

But Thorkel was in a stew. "I cannot wait

—they wait for me. They think me in another place altogether. Tell Gisli this, then, Aud, that my brother-in-law Bork is now on the road for Thorsness, where he will move your man's outlawry, and surely obtain it. I, too, shall be there, but let him not count upon me."

Aud flamed in scorn. "How have you ever taught him to count upon you? Or did it seem to you that he counted on you the last time you were here?"

Thorkel frowned. "It did not. He received me with great indignity. It is almost more than I can bear to set foot here again. Yet he is my brother, and I will do this much for him, that he shall not be taken unawares. I warn him now that mischief is afoot—and more than that, I warn him that Bork goes down in force. Let not Gisli show himself. Let him avoid the country. It is death to him."

Aud had now command over herself. "I will tell him," she said. "What else do you wish me to tell him of yourself?"

Thorkel spread out his hands. "Oh, nothing

more. It is the uttermost. I consider I serve him well."

"I will tell Gisli that," Aud said. Thorkel then hesitated, as if he wished to say more, as if, with some urging, he might say more; but Aud bit her lip lest she should do any urging of him, and with a great sigh Thorkel turned away, and as soon as he was clear of the garth, mounted and rode fast.

She told Gisli everything when he came in, and he received the news calmly. "The first move will be that Bork sets down his suit for trial," he said. "Then a summons will be granted him against me, which he must deliver. He will do it in force, so we may expect to see Thorkel here again. What we must do now is this, to send out your brothers-in-law once more to Thorsness. As for you and me, my love, we can be happy yet for awhile."

He had wisely judged the course of events, but not wisely delayed his preparation. It was near the end of the summer when Thorkel came

again to Holl, and asked for Gisli, and saw him. Thorkel was out of breath, and apparently in as much of a fume as before. Gisli's quiet ways exasperated him.

"How can you ask me whether I am in a hurry? If you care nothing for yourself, can't you have a thought for other men? I tell you that I have given them the slip at the cost of a lie which may be found out at any moment. As it is, my horse is standing before a man's door on the heath, and I am come here on a borrowed beast, and all for your sake."

"How does your change of horses help me?" says Gisli, with an easy smile.

"Are you a fool?" cries his brother. "We are come up sixty strong to Sandwater mouth. Bork is there, Eyolf is there, Fighting Stein and Thorodd, sons of the Codbiter's daughter —and a following which could scour out the dale. And you talk of changing horses. How do you suppose I could get away—by telling Bork that I was coming to warn you? Oh, you fool, and he will be here before I can catch him up."

Thorkel was now fairly hopping about with impatience. "This is the last thing—the very last I do for you. You imperil my life as well as your own—and I am a man with responsibilities. I cannot have it. Now I must be off. Take my warning—avoid Bork. He is too strong for you."

"And for you, too, brother, I see," said Gisli. But Thorkel was pounding up the valley to the heath.

Gisli and Aud looked at each other. "Sweetheart, I'll get into the woods," he said. "Do you stay here till I come for you. Trust me, I'll be back again. Now come and help me load a sleigh." Aud made no fuss at all, but went to help.

He loaded two sleighs with what he thought he should want, and took Thord Faintheart with him to drive one of them. As they were about to start he suddenly stopped his team, and got down.

"Thord," he said to his thrall, "I am over-well-known by this cloak of mine, but they will never hurt you, if you wear it. Change cloaks

with me, man, and if they should summon you to Thorsness instead of me, it will do you no harm, and may do me some good. Mind you, never a word from you, whatever men may say to you. Now then."

Thord did as he was bid, nothing doubted; Gisli kissed Aud, and led his team out of the garth. The way led down the river for a league to a bridge of logs. That must be crossed, and the track followed up on to the fells to the great woods which crowned the first ridge. Once in there, he could work back nearer home; but needs must he first go down stream, because of the bridge.

He made good speed, and was safely over the bridge before dark. Thord the thrall was not so lucky. True that he was over the bridge, but by the time he was crossing Gisli was up the fell and almost within the trees. So it was that Bork and his party riding up the dale saw, so they believed, Gisli in his sea-blue cloak climbing the fell. The two young men, Stein and Thorodd, rode out to pursue him—which when the thrall perceived, he slipped out of the

sledge and set off running to the trees. The pursuers overhauled him rapidly, and called upon him by name—"Vain to fly, Gisli; we know you. Stand, and it will be the better for you" —and so on; but Thord the thrall ran on with all his might. The young men spurred after him, and when they were within range, one of them, Thorodd, I think, stood up in his stirrups and aiming his spear, threw it with skill. It went clean through the thrall, who tumbled forward on his face and never moved again. Bork from the bridge hallooed, "Fine throw!" and the young men pressed on gaily after the other man, the thrall as they supposed, whom they had seen disappearing into the trees. But they could find nothing of him for all they searched up and down, so back they went to their first capture.

Bork was there by now, and all the company. They had turned the dead man over and found out their mistake. Bork was vexed. "He has been too many for us so far. I always knew he was a clever one. Well, we are a large pack. We will just quarter the wood until we find

him. What better proof do you want of his guilt than this is? Come, follow me." They rode off; but Thorkel was not with them. He had stayed by the bridge.

The wood was a great wood and not easy quartering in the dusk. They found the sleigh, but didn't touch it. "No, no," Bork had commanded; "we are after a man, not a booty." So they spread themselves as near as might be to the breadth of the wood and beat towards the head of the valley; Bork had the beat nearest the river, and pushed on until it was dark. Then he had to return if he did not wish to spend the night there. It was not until the party was met again at the bridge that he found himself a man short. An East-country man called Gort was not there. They whooped and hallooed for him, but he never came, and with good reason. He had heard a beat through the thickets, and being a sharp-eyed fellow, had seen something moving in a dense brake—he knew not what. At a venture he had cast his spear, and had actually hit Gisli in the calf of his leg. He heard no sound, however, and

went to recover his spear, supposing he had shot at a fox or some such beast of covert. As he came on, the spear flew out at him and went through his neck. That was the end of Gort.

But they did not stay long on the bridge for their follower. There was much to do. They all rode up the valley to Holl, and there Bork and his two nephews dismounted and knocked at the door. Aud opened it, a torch in her hand. Her eyes were bright and her colour high, but she had no fear. Gudrid the child was with her. No men showed up.

"What is your will?" she asked of Bork.

"A word with you, mistress," he said.

All three of the men were strangers to her, all being from Thorsness. After a moment's hesitation she stood aside with her torch and let them pass into the hall. Hospitality was the custom, and she would not break it. The fire was burning clear; there were no signs of the master's flight. Gudrid fetched drink, and Aud herself offered it. Everything was done

honourably. Bork drank to her, set down his horn, wrung out his red beard, and blinked many times as he sought for words. His eyelashes were straw-colour and glittered in the torchlight.

"Mistress," he said, "I am Bork of Thorsness, and now of Seaboll in right of my wife Thordis. Having told you so much, you will understand why I am here. I have to do with the master of this house, and not with you. But if he is not here, as I believe he is not, it would be within my rights to stay here until he return. Short of that, I am willing, if you are, to deal with you on his behalf. Tell me how you will have it."

"Gisli is not here," said Aud, "and I wish you to treat with me."

"I will do so, then," said Bork. "I have a summons for him to appear at the Thorsness Thing next coming, to answer to a claim of outlawry against him. If you will pass your word that the summons be delivered to him I will leave it with you. Remember that I have no quarrel with yourself."

"I remember what I remember," said Aud, "as the sister of Vestan of Hest."

Bork spread out his hands. "That was no quarrel of mine. But answer me now."

"I will give your message to Gisli when he returns," Aud said. "There will be no trouble about that."

Bork was not pleased, but was committed to fair dealing. "Be it so. Now the suit of outlawry is fairly afoot. We thank you, mistress, for your hospitality, and withdraw as I promised you. You will not have to complain of anything done by men of mine." Then he was for departing, but Aud, whose colour was now like flame, had one more word to say.

"Hospitality was your due; but I marvel that my brother-in-law Thorkel did not claim it also. I think he would have made a good figure, standing here with you." Bork grew as red as his own beard.

"Thorkel! You are welcome to Thorkel. Do you think that he has set the suit moving?"

"I do not," said Aud; "but I know that he sits mounted beyond the garth."

XVIII

THE FLITTING

GISLI, sitting on a rock above Holl, had seen the torchlights flare down below him some thousand feet, and guessed at what was going on. Still and cold was the night under the clear stars, so still that he had heard men's voices—Bork's raised in command, others dissenting or urging agreement; presently a murmur of confused sound certified him of horses in movement. They went down the dale and faded out. By that he concluded that the business was done and the enemy off to the frith and their ships down there. He could not be sure until daylight, because they might set a watch at the bridge; therefore he must spend the night in the wood. That didn't disturb him at all, but he must find his sleigh. He had bound up his wounded leg, which was now stiff and throbbing: walking was a painful business; but, as he said, he had all night to do it in.

He came upon it just where he had left it; his two ponies cropping the herbage directed him by their snorting and shaking of harness. Wrapt up in his furs, he took an uneasy sleep, greatly disturbed by the smarting and beating of his wound.

In the morning he drove slowly back towards the bridge. The coast was clear. He found the second sleigh where he had expected it to be; but before he reached that he came upon the body of Thord his thrall stiff on his back and staring up at the sky. He took back his own cloak, and gave the poor wretch burial, raising a cairn over him as seemed to him fitting. When the rites were done he took his way home, and half-way thither saw Gudrid perched on a boulder to spy for him. She waved her hand, then slipped down and ran home. Soon after that he saw Aud awaiting him. He had her in his arms within a few minutes.

"Sweetheart, we will be off, if may be, this very day," he said, when he had heard all she had to tell him. "I will take you and the maid, and all our gear down to the strand. A neigh-

bour will lodge you while I go over to Hest and bid our brothers to Thorsness to plead for us. They will not prevail, but we must try it. Then we take boat and out to sea."

"Whither shall you go?" she asked him. He laughed at her.

"Much you care where we go so long as we are together."

"That is true," said she, "but how can we be together with you an outlaw?"

"Leave that to me," he said. "I think we shall have some years together yet." She sighed.

"Yes, and then?"

"And then?" said Gisli. "What answer can any man living give to such a question? And then—we shall see."

They were not, in fact, clear of Holl for seven nights, for he chose to take stock and forage with him, and to get all that down to the strand took time. He had to collect his money also from the purchaser of Holl, and to charter a sleigh to his liking. Thorkel Rich of Alvidra furnished him with a good ship.

Alone he crossed the frith and rode up to Hest, nigh upon the fells, where Gunnhild, Vestan's widow, and her two boys were still living, within hail of them being the three brothers-in-law, sons of Biartmar. Vestan's two boys were fourteen and twelve years old; Berg was the elder, a handsome lad, black and high-coloured like his father; and Helgi was the other, meaner-looking than his brother, but with more wit. Those two were by and listening to the talk between Gisli and his brothers-in-law, and when all their business was done and Gisli sitting by the fire with a horn of mead, they drew near to him and asked to see his weapons.

"I have but one with me," Gisli said, and showed them a broad-bladed spear of thin grey steel upon a haft made of ashwood.

Helgi, the younger boy, felt the edge. "That's a keen blade," he said, "and I warrant a fine temper."

"It has a queer temper," said Gisli, "and has done mischief enough to my house and to yours."

"Was it with that my father was killed?"

Gisli nodded.

"And with that you slew Thorgrim?"

Gisli nodded.

"And what next?"

"It may turn upon my house next," said Gisli, "unless I make away with the thing. I rather think Grayflanks has done murder enough."

Berg, the elder boy, now had Grayflanks in his hand. "A sword became a spear!" Then he asked Gisli, "Will you let me have it instead of throwing it into the frith?"

"What do you want with it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I am turned fourteen years."

Gisli looked him in the eyes. "I know you are, my lad, and for that reason I will keep Grayflanks myself, rather than give it to you. This blade, you must know, turns against its owner. That has been the way of it ever since my father did a wrong to get it. It has done mischief enough to us all as it is. I keep it and its mischief now to myself."

Late as it was, he went down to Aud that

night, saying that he knew not how many more nights he might have to spend with her, and next day with all his gear aboard he sailed out of Dyrafrith, turned Husaness, and sailed up into Arnafrith, which is a noble arm of the sea, but no so broad that you cannot see a faint blue line of the land on either side of you. Holding up the frith for a day and a night, he brought his ship into the narrows and still bore up in a smooth and small water where the rocks come down sheer into the sea, and it is hard to find a landing-place, and still harder to understand how a man may get a livelihood out of such a country. He was now in Geirthiofsfrith, which was where he intended to found a homestead for Aud.

He ran ashore in a little cove of hard white sand, got his skiff ashore, and with a hind or two to help him, who came, as it seemed, out of the rocks, like rabbits, he wound the ship up high and dry, loaded his sleighs and climbed slowly up the braeside. All day they climbed, and just before dusk reached a level stretch of grassland on the edge of a little tarn. A few

trees grew here, and there looked to be space for a homestead. There indeed, by the end of the winter, working with fury, helped by a few men from the shore, and by Aud and the girl too, he did succed in raising a fair timber house —not large, but large enough. Before it was done he had news that he was outlawed—not from his brothers-in-law, who were ashamed of the small part they had been able to play, but from Thorkel Rich of Alvidra, to whom they had confessed their discomfiture. "Now then," he said, "the end of me is in sight."

"No, no," Alvidra said, "not while I can give thee shelter, man."

"That will not be for long," Gisli said. "But I have many a shift and turn to take yet, and will lead fat Bork a pretty dance up and down before he pins me to a corner."

Alvidra admired. "You shirk nothing. You are a brave man. Yet I suppose life is a sweet thing."

"It is a sweet thing to me," said Gisli, "because love makes it so. If it were not for Aud, I should not be bothered with life."

XIX

THE HUNT IS UP

THE man from whom I had this tale in the beginning says that Gisli lived three years at Geirthiofsfrith with Aud in the house which he had built her, and then another three years wandering from great house to great house, trying, but in vain, to procure help of the great men who lived in them countenance at the Assembly which might condone the outlawry, but he says that the witchcraft of Bottlenose always prevailed; no chief would house him for long, and none take up his case at Thorsness Thing. After these six years were over, he goes on to say, Gisli gave up all attempts to win friends and spent his time either with Aud at the house, or in hiding-places which he had made in the rocks which hem in the frith on all sides but one. He had a cave on the north side of the frith, and a lurking-place among the

crags on the south side; and that was the holt he chiefly favoured.

All this may be true; anyhow I must accept it, for I cannot contradict it. But now he says that after those six years, three of steady sojourn and three of wandering about, Bork the Fat, down at Thorsness, hears of him up there in the frith, and goes up to Otterdale to see his friend and kinsman, Eyolf the Gray. There I think him wrong. I think it more likely that Eyolf the Gray told Bork of Gisli's whereabouts; and for this reason, that Otterdale runs down into Arnarfrith, whereof Geirthiofsfrith is an arm. At the Thing or elsewhere Eyolf would meet Bork, and having the news in his head would ask him whether that old outlawry held or not.

"Hold! I should think it held. When did you ever know me to drop a scent?"

"Why, never before. Yet here is your man within a bird's flight of my house, and you not so much as come up the dale to learn about it."

"But I am learning about it now," says Bork. "How did you find him?"

"I did not find him then. But the Needle did."

The Needle was a thrall named Helgi, a thin, silent and swift man with eyes like augers and feet shod with wind. No doubt the Needle pointed him out to Eyolf, and Eyolf to Bork.

However all that may be, Bork and Eyolf came together, and Eyolf was persuaded to take up the hunting of Gisli. Three hundred pounds of silver was the price offered and accepted, and the bullion was actually deposited at Otterdale before Eyolf would do anything. That settled, Bork the Fat went home and told Thordis, his fierce and handsome wife, what had been done. Thordis was nursing a third child. Fair and rich did she look in the act; but resentment still smouldered in her eyes, a grudge against the world at large, not wholly her footstool. To see so flaming a face, such angry eyes above a breast of snow was unaccountable. "You have done after your kind," she said. "Now we shall see if Eyolf will do for hire what you cannot do for love of your kindred. But not as you deal did your brother Thorgrim.

No—he was a man. You and my brother Thorkel are a pair." Bork was annoyed.

"Lucky for the world that there is not your pair in it, I think. It is not every woman would seek her brother's life." She bit her lip and at the same time turned him her back. The child at her breast fretted and strove. Thordis satisfied him, and watched him as he sucked. Bork shrugged his shoulders, and turned presently to his affairs. He had his consolations, I believe; but Thordis was not a good housemate.

Eyolf lost no time in setting the Needle to work. This man spent his days on the crags, where he would sit motionless and watchful, as a cat sits in long grass. Gisli was not long in finding him at it. He shifted his quarters to another creek, and then deliberately showed himself at the old place. The Needle saw him, and soon disappeared. Then Gisli knew that he was being hunted.

Sure enough a boat was rowed up the frith next day. Six men were standing up in the stern, and one sat to steer. The helmsman was

Eyolf. They moored just below the cave, and came cautiously climbing the rocks. Gisli, watching them, saw them peering into the hole, finally enter it. He waited till they came out; saw them descend, hold a conversation with Eyolf, who still sat in his boat; then they shipped the mooring-stone and rowed slowly down the frith. He was now spied upon again, so far as he knew, for a month or more—but his mind was never easy after that first experience.

The next move in the game was unexpected by Gisli. The Needle must have seen him unawares, for a boat came into Geirthiofsfrith with eight men aboard, and six of them climbed the fell and surrounded the house up there. Gudrid saw them coming, and told Aud. She said, "Let them come."

Eyolf himself with his light-blue eyes and stretched smile came into the hall. Two others were with him, all three armed. Aud, who looked very young because she was so slim and quick-moving, did not greet them, but stood up to face them, one hand upon the table.

Eyolf, always smiling, waited for her to speak. But she had nothing to say.

Then he said, "Mistress, you know my errand?"

"I do not," said Aud. "It is not easy to say why three armed men should come against two women."

"Nay, dame, nay," he said, rubbing his chin, still smiling; "we are come to see the good man." Aud looked him full in the face.

"The only murder you will do here will be of women. Gisli is not here."

The men looked at each other. One of them, who was red in the face, told her that they did not wish to hurt her. Eyolf, searching all corners of the room with his eyes, but avoiding hers, added, "No, no, we hope it will not come to that." Then he said with a little chuckling noise, "We are prepared to treat with you handsomely. You will find us liberal in dealing."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked him.

He laughed again. "You know as well as I do what I mean."

"Nay," she said, "but it were better you should explain yourself."

Then he took a bag out of his breast, a heavy bag, and emptied it on to the table—sliding, shining, broad pieces of silver, which slipped over one another like fish on a quay. And then he looked at Aud: "Yours, ma'am, for a word."

Aud, whose breath could be heard whistling in her nostrils, came near and laid a hand on the table. With a sweep of the hand she sent the stuff flying across the hall. "You are answered," she said.

Eyolf was very angry, and though he still smiled, the smile was terrible, a flat line across the middle of his face like the grin of a skull. He went close to Aud. "I can do you harm for that insult," he said. "I have known a woman's hand cut off for the like." But Aud did not flinch.

"I do not doubt but you have known it, and no man better. Who should know it better

than you?" His men were collecting the coins and shovelling them back into the bag. By this time Eyolf was at the door. "Follow me," he bade them, and turned once more to Aud, "There can be but one end to this, as you know very well. Next time I come to see you I advise you to behave yourself." She took no notice of him at all, having her back turned. But the girl Gudrid was looking at him all the time with wide eyes, as if he were some kind of a monster.

There was no more spying after Gisli for several months; nevertheless he thought it better to be out of the country for the winter. At that season his caves would be uninhabitable, since he dare not light a fire; and if he stayed at home he might be pinched in the night and killed like a rat in a drain. Aud wanted him to go too; so he kissed her, promising to be back in the spring.

"I will trust you," she said. "You have never broken your word to me." Then she clung to him with passion. "Oh, how many more winters can you promise me this and I be-

lieve it?" He felt sure that there could not be many more, but would not tell her so.

"Don't look too far forward, sweetheart. Who knows his end? Trust me this once—and next fall we will see." So she let him go.

He went South, over the watershed and down to Bardastrand, where Thorkel his brother was now living, within sound of the sea-waves. He knocked at the door late at night, but Thorkel got out of bed and opened to him.

"Who is it comes so late?"

"One," said Gisli, "who dares not come early."

"Is it you, Gisli?"

"You know the worst of me," Gisli said.

Thorkel let him in, and stirred up the peat fire. He was sleepy and dull: could not, or did not, rouse himself.

Gisli stretched his hands to the fire.

"Here am I," he said, "your brother, driven from home by friends of yours for a business which began by your folly. What do you mean to do with me?"

Thorkel said feebly, "What can I do?"

"Ask yourself," said Gisli, "what I should do, if you were in my place, and I in yours."

Thorkel immediately betrayed his full knowledge of what Gisli would have done. "No, no, I cannot indeed. I told you that before. It is asking too much. Money, wool, horses, fodder, what you will. But I cannot keep you here. Indeed I cannot do it. I have a large estate—I am committed in many ways. Asgerd is far from well. Gisli," he said earnestly, "at peril of my life—twice—I have warned you. That I have done. Thordis, our sister, has expected very differently of me. But no—I would not budge—not one inch."

"Brave man," said Gisli to the fire, "a stout heart." Thorkel, looking round, saw Asgerd at the door of her bed-chamber. Her hair was all about her. She had a blanket over her.

"What do you want?" he asked. She came up to the fire.

"You must give Gisli shelter to-night. You must do it." Gisli looked up.

"Poor girl," he said.

"All this trouble—I made it," said Asgerd.

"Now if you do not shelter him but drive him out into the dark, I shall go with him."

"Poor girl," said Gisli, "and a brave girl."

Thorkel hated it, but he had to give way. Gisli slept there one night, but went on next day. He accepted some bales of wool which he said would buy him a lodging for the winter. Asgerd wished him to stop, telling that she could force Thorkel into allowing it, but he would not have that. He never blamed her, never had blamed her for her share in the trouble. Indeed, he had never seen her to speak with since she left Holl. After the slaughter of Vestan, Thordis had kept her close. He told her now that he would not have Thorkel driven into a corner on his account. "I have done him harm enough," he said, "though never willingly. I wish him no ill—still less would I see you injured." He blessed her before he went.

But to Thorkel he had something else to say. "You best know how you have behaved in our joint adventures. You best know how you can justify yourself now. It is likely that my days

are counted, but something tells me that yours will be shorter than mine. I think we shall not meet again, Thorkel!" His brother looked at him as if he didn't understand what he was talking about; but Gisli had a spaegift in these days. Dreams at night certified him. He used to be led by a veiled woman through a great hall where a number of fires were burning. The first time she had taken him through there had been seven of them; the next time six; the next five. The last time he had been there only three fires were alight.

Thorkel, as I say, stood staring stupidly at his brother, and that made Gisli angry.

"Yes, you are planted firm on the earth, you think; you are a great man of lands and gear; you are a befriended man; chieftains make you welcome when you go down to the booths. I am like the hare that has no home, anybody's quarry. Let it be so. I tell you that you will be slain before me, though I have but three years left to live. Think of that, and make your peace while you may." Now Thorkel was angry.

"Your spaedoms are nothing to me. You seem to threaten me. Nevertheless go in peace."

Gisli struck up over the mountain and harboured with a good soul at Vadil, a widow woman named Thorgerd.

XX

THORKEL'S BANE

GISLI had seen truly. The end of Thorkel was this. There was a Thing to be held at Thorskafirth, which is at the very end of Broadfirth, and so in the middle of North Iceland. All the great men of the North and West would go there, as of course, and among them, without a doubt, Thorkel from Combe, and Bork from Thorsness. Gest the Wise, who lived at Hagi on Bardastrand, was going too, and was down on the shore overseeing his ship, with all his people at work and about him. Two lads, hatless, shoeless, limping, bleeding in the feet, come down to the shore, and stand at a little distance, looking at the men busy.

Strangers were not such a common sight, and yet—for you never knew—none too welcome a sight. Every one down there saw the lads, but no one hailed them. Gest himself, who

saw everything, was one of the first to know that they were there. After a quarter of an hour or so he said quietly to a man near him, "Go and see who they are, and come back to me with your news."

The man was not long gone. He came back to Gest. "They say that they are strangers going to Thorkskafirth Thing. They ask to speak with you." Gest nodded and took no notice, but went on with his overseeing of the work on the ship. When everything was going as he wished, he gave a few directions and said he would be back presently. Then he turned his pony's head and walked him up to where the two lads were standing. One of them was a head taller than the other, very handsome, dark-haired, red-brown skin, grey eyes, very white teeth. The other boy was dark also, but pale and freckled, not strong-looking. One of his feet was bound up in a rag, and the other bleeding.

"Now, my lads," Gest said, "what is it you want with me?"

The elder said, "We ask of you a passage up

the frith to the Thing. We are come a long way to get it."

"There's every sign of it," Gest said. "Over the fells, I warrant, and over a snow-field into the bargain."

"Yes, sir."

"And all the way afoot?"

"No, sir. We had a passage in a cattleboat as far as Otterdale."

Gest's eyes flashed. "You went ashore at Otterdale? Did you see anything of Eyolf of that place, or his people?"

"No. We saw no one there, and no one saw us."

"Are you hungry?"

The boy looked at his brother. "He is hungry. I don't care for myself."

"You shall be fed," Gest said. "Now, what made you come here, to me?"

"If I tell you my name you will know," said the lad. Gest held up his hand.

"Enough said. I will take you part of the way at least. And you shall be sheltered down here, and fed, and washed, on condition that

you say nothing of yourselves to any one here. I am sure you understand me. If you do not, I am sorry, for then you must get somebody else to take you up the frith. This is my condition. Do you accept it?"

"We accept it," the boy said, "and thank you kindly."

Gest said no more to them, but with a jerk of his head beckoned them to follow him. He took them to the house of one of his people, gave them over to the goodwife, and left them with her. That was all he saw of them until he took them aboard, but of course he knew very well that they were Berg and Helgi, the sons of Vestan. He was one of the wisest of men, was Gest, and of the same kindred as those boys and Aud, Gisli's wife.

When the ship was ready, Gest, having the runagates aboard, sailed up the frith. He did not steer a straight coarse, but held up by the shore, and stayed at Hallsteinsness, which is about six hours' sailing from Thorskafrith. Here he put the boys ashore.

"You will be there before me," he said.

"Your road is over the shoulder, through that great wood. You won't be alone on it. Keep my condition faithfully, and if you see me hereafter at the Thing you will not know who I am." They would have thanked him but he waved them away.

The lads went up the hill and into the great wood, which is called Teigwood in those parts. Over the shoulder it was all downhill to Thorskafrith, and once out of the wood you could see it all mapped out below you, the water lapping on white sand, the shining rocks, Thorskafrith town itself, with the river sprawling down from the dales, this side the town, in a mead overlooking the sea, the booths where the men of the Thing abode. The harbour was crowded with shipping, for many of the chiefs had come in.

The two boys went through the booths until they came upon the last and meanest of them, where a fat man in a leather apron stood. His thumbs were in his apron, and one of his eyes met theirs. The other could not, but looked sideways at the weather. Other men were in the hut, lying about, or mending their clothes.

Berg asked this man for a lodging, and the man hummed a little tune.

"Well," he said, "we are a mixed company, but we might find a corner. Who might you two be by chance?"

Berg told him that they were beggars, living as they could.

"And yet," said their host, "you have a mother and father, I suppose, like all the rest of the world?"

Berg pitched him a long tale about a feud, a house burning, and an escape by night. Whether Halbiorn, which was the host's name, believed it or not, is not to be known. He accepted the boys into his company of wastrels —ten or twelve of them; and presently, as he was going out to the ness to see the ships come in, they went with him. All three sat down in the bents.

It was a fine sight to see the ships come surging in on the rising tide. Six or eight sweeps a side were used, for there was no wind. Almost the first one they saw was Gest's; but Berg asked whose it was.

"Gest's the Wise," they were told, "of Hagi on Bardastrand."

Close behind Gest's there came another ship, very bravely painted, with a man at the stern folded in a cloak, and brightly helmed.

"Whose ship comes now?" Berg asked.

"That is Thorkel Soursson from the Combe."

"He looks a fine man," Berg said, and Halbiorn agreed with a chuckle.

"Ah, and he is fine. And yet not so fine as he believes himself to be."

Then they went to see the chieftains come ashore; and after that there were plenty other sights, so long as the daylight lasted. Late in the evening, among the booths, word went round that Bork from Thorsness had just come in.

The morning broke fair; all the world was early astir. Men like Bork Fat, who had come in late overnight, were busy with their booths. The place was crowded with those who worked and those who looked on. Beggars were plenty. Halbiorn alone had sheltered fifteen of them in his hut.

Berg and Helgi made their way down the line

of booths, in no way distinguishable from other vagabonds, except to eyes like Gest's. Those far-seeing eyes were upon them as they passed by his booth.

At the end of the street, in a place by itself overlooking the sea, was a large booth, and before it, on a stool in the sun, sat a large man of fine presence, and well dressed. His cloak was round him, for the air was still fresh. On his knees lay a sheathed sword. The two boys stood within hail, looking at him. Helgi, the young one, said to his brother, "Who may that great chief be?"

"Nay, how should I know?"

"I never saw a greater man than that," said Helgi.

Thorkel heard him and laughed.

"You speak well of me," he said. "My name is Thorkel Soursson." The two boys came closer. They looked at the sword on his knees.

Berg said, "I warrant that a noble sword."

"It's not a bad sword," said Thorkel.

"May I look at it?" he was asked.

Thorkel laughed again. "You have a way

with you, it seems to me. But why not? Yes, you may look at it."

Berg took the sword in both hands, and stepped back a pace or two. He turned it about once or twice. Then with a jerk he had snapped the peace-strings and had it naked in his hand.

"Hey," said Thorkel, "I gave no leave for that."

"I asked none," said Berg, and hewed at his neck. Thorkel flushed crimson and fell forward in a drench of blood. Berg dropped the sword, turned and ran, Helgi after him. Men looked up and saw Thorkel down. Some one raised the cry, "A man is hit!" and many ran to him. Berg and Helgi raced on. Passing Bork's booth they saw that red-bearded chief in the way. He asked, "Who is it? What are they all about down there?" Berg said nothing, but dodged him and ran on. Helgi said as he passed, "They are asking whether Vestan left daughters or sons behind him." Then on he went.

All the beggars were on the move too, but some of them were caught and detained, and

Halbiorn, their host, among them. Bork took up the affair, as his duty was. Who were those boys who had passed him? Halbiorn told all he knew, which was nothing. Meantime the boys themselves were not to be found. Bork went out to Gest's booth and saw Gest himself.

"Thorkel is slain," says Bork.

Gest said, "A sad business for you."

"Very bad. A near relation. My wife's favourite brother. She will take it hard."

Gest said, "I think it likely. Whom do you suspect of the thing?"

Bork told him about the two lads. One of them had said something about Vestan's sons or daughters—Bork had hardly caught the words, but knew that Vestan was mentioned. "You know of the feud with Gisli," he said. "Now, put the thing together. I shall hardly be wrong if I bring a suit of outlawry against the sons of Vestan. What do you think?"

"If you did that," said Gest slowly, "I don't think it would need a clever man to throw your suit out. Suppose you brought it against me, for instance, what should I do? I should name

another man as the slayer, and bring witnesses. You, having no witnesses, would be out. Who saw the boys do the deed? Suppose that they told you the truth, and that men were talking about Vestan and his sons or daughters? Would it not be a likely thing to talk about over the body of Thorkel? I think you will fail. You have not the boys here, you say. Nobody knows who they are, or where they are. What are you to do?"

"According to you, nothing," says Bork, very red in the face. He knew quite well that Gest was kinsman of Vestan—but that didn't help him, for he didn't know, and was never told, that Gest had brought the pair up to Thorskafrith. If he had known that it might have turned out differently.

They buried Thorkel in his boat, and heaped a barrow over him. The Thing was held, and men went their ways. Bork knew himself dishonoured, and felt it none the less for what Thordis had to say. The result of it all was to revive the feud against Gisli, as might have been expected.

As for the boys, they were ten days on the fells before they reached Geirthiofsfrith. Gisli was at home when they came, and asleep. He never slept in the house for fear of being taken or burned. He had made himself an earth house underground, and could get a warning from Aud at once if need were.

It was Aud who opened the door to them and heard their account of themselves. She made no comment, but gave them food and blankets. "I dare not take you in," she said. "Gisli is at home, and will take it very hardly. He loved his brother through all. You must sleep as you can in the wood, and when you are rested I will get you a boat to take you home. That is all I can do." They took it all as a matter of course, and were away in two days' time.

But directly they had left the house Aud went down to Gisli in his cave, and sat on his bed. He was awake when she came in, and looked at her without speaking. She looked gently and gravely at him in her turn, as if she were thinking how she should frame what she had to say.

It was Gisli who broke the silence. "Well, Aud?" he said. "What now?"

"I am wondering," she said.

"I see it. What is your wonder?"

"What you will say to me when I tell you something."

He clasped his hands behind his head. "I think I know your 'something.'"

"Oh, no, you cannot."

"But I do. You will tell me that Thorkel is slain."

She nodded her head. "Yes, and Vestan's boys have slain him. There is no end to our trouble."

Gisli said, "There will soon be an end to it. They have done no service to you and me. The feud against me might have slept but for this." He frowned and looked down his length lying in the bed.

Aud touched his hand. "Gisli," she said. He looked at her immediately, with eyes full of patience.

"Well, my love?"

"I have brought you nothing but sorrow. I have not given you a child—and you may even thank me for that. And now it may be my kindred that will bring about your death. What have you to say to me now?"

He bade her kneel by him; he took her face between his hands and kissed her mouth. He said, "No man has had greater love than I, and no woman deserved more thanks from a man than you. You blame yourself wrongly. Vestan was my friend before you were my beloved, and Thordis hated me before we set foot in Iceland."

"But Thordis hates me more than you," said Aud. Gisli kissed her again.

"Do you know why? Because you had the love of a man, and gave him the love of a woman, and because she had neither, to give or to get. She grudged you your heart as well as your joy, and neither riches nor her children were worth anything to her compared with that. I tell you, let all be as it must be. You and I have had our share of the good things of this

world. Now come to bed, and comfort me while you may—for the end is near."

In his dream only one fire showed in the great hall.

XXI

THE FIRE IN THE WOOD

THE chase after Gisli lasted another year, with no good result to any one. But now Gisli himself, warned by his dream, wandered no more. He kept about Aud's house, and awaited the end. The chase indeed had been too hot, the escapes he had had too fine. There had been a time when he would have found sport in such things—but that time was past. He had played the part of an idiot boy on Broadfrith and been so close to Bork that he could have knocked him over the head with an oar; he had been hidden in a woman's bed and Bork in the house. But now he was tired, and ready to give it up. And he thought that Aud was tired and might be easier in her mind when she had got the worst over. She might marry again perhaps—but he thought that she would not. He was so near the end now that the thought of

that did not make him hot all over or send the blood surging to his head. So now it was that he spent his days in the woods which closed in the head of the frith, and his nights in the cave which he had dug for himself by Aud's house.

At Otterdale in the late autumn a man called Howard was staying with Eyolf, having come home from Norway. He was cousin to Gest the Wise, but of no kindred to Gisli. Indeed he knew nothing at all about Gisli and heard of him now from Eyolf as a dangerous and cunning outlaw whom it was everybody's business to put out of the way. When Eyolf was about sending Helgi the Needle out once more this Howard said that he would go too. He did not say that, on the whole, his sympathies lay with the hunted rather than the hunter, though that was the state of his case. They gave out that they were come after fuel for the winter to anybody whom they saw at the frith-head; but there were very few people living there.

Three days were spent in the woods with no

result. The weather was fine and still, but the nights were cold. On the third afternoon, just after sundown, the Needle pointed out smoke rising on the hillside, south of the frith, they themselves being on the north. Howard saw it plainly enough, a column of blue smoke which seemed to rise out of some crags jutting up among the trees. The hour was late, after sundown, and it would soon be dark.

"Yes, there's some one there," Howard said. "What are you going to do? We can't get out there to-night."

"There's only one thing for it," the Needle told him. "We must build a cairn here, and take a sight from it. It must be a great cairn too, or we shall never find it."

They set to work piling the cairn and went on until it was pitchy dark. Howard then said that he had had enough of it, and meant to sleep for a spell. Helgi went on with his cairn for a time; but presently he too tired, and lay down in his cloak. When he was down Howard sat up and thought.

All his thoughts ran, "This is bad work for

me." And then he began to say to himself, "I must give the man a chance." He was serious about it too, for he stood up and stone by stone demolished the cairn, bringing it down so low that nothing could have been seen of it from the water. That done, he had, if possible, to prevent the Needle from making it up again—no hard matter, he thought.

He picked up a great boulder in both hands, and lumped it down with a crash close to Helgi's head. Up sprang the Needle in a terror.

"What was that? Oh, my head, what was that?"

"That's only one," says Howard, "but it was near enough. There's a man in the wood near about who has been at that sport all the time."

"That is Gisli," says the Needle, "and I am off. He is a mighty man, I can tell you. A stone like that is nothing to him. And what does he care for your life or mine? Not a pinhead. Come, we will be running."

Even as he spoke he was scurrying down the wood. Howard, chuckling, went down more

leisurely, and found him on the shore in a fume to be off. "I wish you would hurry yourself," he said. "You little know what that man is."

"I thought you were hunting him," says Howard. "It seems to me that he is hunting you, rather."

"Come, come, we must be out of this," says the Needle, hopping about.

They reported to Eyolf, who said, "Now then we have him." With daylight he was out with a boatload of armed men, and was rowed up to the head of the frith. Never a sign of a cairn to be seen.

"How's this? And where's your cairn?" The Needle was gaping up the side of the mountain. "It was there, for I built it."

"Yes, and somebody has unbuilt it for you. I am being made a fool of between you."

They didn't know what to do next. Eyolf, very unwilling to go back, said he would try Aud once more.

They went up the hill to the house in a body. Aud let them in, having no sign of fear. Gudrid stood by her. Howard looked long at her

and thought her a beautiful woman. Her simplicity and gravity became her well.

Eyolf said he had come to talk plainly, and wished to sit down. "You were unreasonable to me the last time I came," he said. "I might have been angry, and resented it—for I have the law on my side, as you know. But here I am, you see, without malice. Now I ask you to tell me where Gisli is, and so save your troubles and mine. There's no reason at all why you and I should not be friends. Haven't I showed that by coming here again after your treatment of me last year?"

And said that she was prepared to hear him. "That's right," says Eyolf; "that is what I want of you. Now I need not tell a handsome woman that there are good fish in the sea, or good men in Iceland; and I need not ask what kind of a place this is for a woman to be penned in. Are you inclined to better it? Are you inclined to be at peace? Hey, mistress?"

He was grinning in a very watery and friendly manner. Howard watched And sharply. She was looking to the ground; her

colour was high, as he saw her bosom rise and fall quickly. Short of breath, was she? Perhaps she was bitten.

Yes, she said, she did wish to be at peace.

"I thought so," said Eyolf. "Well, I will be very plain with you now. My friend Bork, who is the pursuer in this case, has put into my hands three hundred pounds of silver if I will do his business for him. That same silver I will put in your lap, neither more nor less, if you will tell me what I want to know. Mind you, it is to save time and misery. There is only one end to an outlawry. That you know. Why, Gisli himself, I dare swear, would be glad to have it ended. Hey, mistress?'

And said she thought it likely. Then she said, had he brought the silver with him?

"Why no," he said, "not all of it. But I have an earnest of it here, and will give you a bond for the remainder." That said, he brought out a great purse and began slipping coin after coin on to the table. Presently there was a great pile of it. Midway the counting, Howard noticed that the girl Gudrid was cry-

ing. Before it was over she had gone out of the hall.

There sat Eyolf smiling at his money. Aud, who never raised her eyes, said, "Do you hand me that over to use as I will?"

"To be sure I do—on my terms."

She turned to a cupboard behind her and brought out a bag. She counted the money as she dropped it in. She tied up the bag with twine. She lifted it with both hands and seemed to swing it, as if weighing it. Eyolf smiled and fingered his beard. Aud swung the sack a few times, and suddenly brought it with a crash into Eyolf's face. It caught him on the side of the nose and knocked him down. The blood was all over him.

"You dog," she said, "who thought me as vile as you. Have you not learned where to go marketing yet? Now go home and say that a woman has broken your nose. Go home, and grin in your wife's face. You will get nothing better out of me."

Eyolf, in a fury of pain and rage, sat up. He

had to hold his nose, but he managed to speak. "Men," he said, "make an end of her."

"If I know them they will do nothing of the sort. The business is bad enough without that. So far as I see, you have brought it on yourself." Eyolf had no more to say. His men helped him out. Howard stayed behind.

"If all men had wives like you there would be no Eyolfs in it," he said. She looked at him gratefully.

"I would say that if all women had men like mine there would be no need for outlawries. All that he has ever done has been to serve other folk."

"I wish I could serve you better," says Howard.

"You cannot. You have saved my life, and Gisli will thank you for that. Will you take this ring from me? He gave it me. He would wish you to have it."

"I will take it thankfully," he said, "in memory of a brave woman."

Howard sent for his gear from Otterdale and

took ship to Bardastrand. He did not feel that he could see Eyolf again.

The Needle said that it was plain Gisli was close at hand. "The girl slipped away to tell him that Aud was selling his life. He had best burn him out."

XXII

GRAYFLANKS ENDS IT

GISLI had laughed when Gudrid came and told him with tears that Aud had lost her mind and was taking Eyolf's money.

"What are you telling me? She would as soon take his kisses." Thinking it over, he saw what the Needle had seen. "They will know me at hand, and will try to burn me out. This is the end of it."

His dreams began again. He was led into the great hall. It was dark and cold, and in the dark he could see white ash heaped upon the hearths, but no fire anywhere. Then he saw himself lying on wet grass, and a woman whose face was hidden knelt beside him and bound up his head in a bloody clout. On the trees all about there were hawks sitting. Their beaks were red and wet, and a smear of clotted blood was upon their breasts. Some of his dreams he

told to Aud, but most of them he kept to himself.

He was out and about in the woods all day, but dared not go very far afield lest Eyolf's men should come and burn the house. Then, on the morning of the first frost, when the leaves were falling all about like great snowflakes, he saw a ship rowing up the frith. He looked at it for some time, then turned, and went home.

Aud saw that he was pale; but he spoke quietly as if the matter was some everyday business. "We had better be going over to the South crags," he said. "You and Gudrid should come with me."

Aud was true to herself. "Shall we go at once?"

"Yes," he said, "the sooner the better."

She saw him kneeling at a coffer, saw him take out a short-handled spear, and knew it at once. He came back to her, with his hat and cloak on, the spear in his hand.

"Are you ready?" he asked her. She called Gudrid. He gave each of them a club to carry.

"The trees are wet with rime," he said. "You can keep them out of the way with those."

Then they left the house, he leading the way in and out of the thickets. No one said anything, but Gisli kept looking behind him to see if they were followed. So they made their way round the head of the frith, and reached the hiding-place by noon. They made a meal, and Gisli said that he would try to sleep if they would keep a look-out.

He lay down with his head on Aud's knee. Gudrid crouched at the entry of the cave and watched the woods. It was a still, sunny noon, very beautiful and peaceful.

After a time of silence, Gisli lying very still with his eyes closed, Aud immovable as a woman of stone, Gudrid saw something moving in the bushes to the right. Without turning her eyes away, she said, "Men are coming this way." Gisli opened his eyes and sat up. He went out of the cave and looked over the woods. "They have traced us in the rime. Come after me on to the rocks." They climbed the rocks and reached a level place a few yards breadth,

backed by a tall cliff of grey stone. "There is room for all of us here," he said.

Below them, presently, they saw the men. Eyolf was leading, an ax in his hand. Helgi the Needle came behind him, then a tall man with a black beard and very red face; then others unknown to them—twelve in all. Eyolf, looking up, saw his quarry, and pointed it out. They had a short conversation and then began to climb the rocks. They stopped when they reached the platform in front of the cave. Then Eyolf looked up again, and they could see the black scar on one side of his nose. "He carries your mark on him," said Gisli. And did not answer.

It was Eyolf who spoke first. "You had best stay where you are. There can only be one end to this. You are known for a brave man. Let us settle accounts here."

"I shan't move," Gisli said. "Come up here when you are ready. And come up yourself, for it is your quarrel, and not your friends'."

Eyolf grinned fearfully. "Leave that to me."

"If I do that," Gisli said, "I leave it to the others. You are a man who hires."

Eyolf talked with the other men, and chiefly with Helgi. Then all of them were seen to be egging on the Needle, who looked keenly up the rocks, and seemed doubtful. He and Eyolf talked together again; and then Helgi made a dash at the rocks, an ax in his hand. At the same time Eyolf went behind his company and disappeared.

Gisli had put Grayflanks up against the cliff, and had his sword drawn. Helgi came up with a rush, and reached the platform where the three were. There as he stood swaying, his ax in the air, Gisli drave a fearful blow and shore him through at the waist. He went toppling back, the halves of him two ways; but by that time Eyolf was up the rocks on the other side, and was seen by Aud. Before he could get a fair footing she had swung her club aloft, and brought it down upon his right arm at the elbow. He cried out, "She has broken my arm!" and fell, but saved himself by catching at a root with his left hand. He slid down the

steep to where his friends were, and there he sat down and clasped his smashed elbow.

Gisli knew that no man ever had a wife like his—at the same time she had done him harm while she meant his good. He would have settled Eyolf if she had left it to him.

All this went through his head in a flash, for they gave him no time to waste on thinking. Twelve of them came up the rocks together. Two were sent down with boulders; two he killed with the sword; another cast a spear at him, but he cut it in half with the sword. The rest shambled down; and then he made a mistake. He had snatched up Grayflanks, and now hurled it at his retreating enemies. It went clean through a man's back between the shoulders and dropped him stone-dead. Eyolf called out sharply, "Bring me that spear," and soon held in his hands what Gisli knew was his bane.

Four men had been killed by now, and two knocked out of fight. No one came up the rocks for a time, but a shower of spears was begun which threatened the lives of Aud and Gudrid.

Gisli had to shift his quarters, and did so in an instant. He took a standing leap from where he was on to another rock, and thence still higher to a flat place above him. There he called to the foe to come out; but it was not so good a place for him. It had no back wall and could be reached from two sides.

That was how they got him at last. A party of them held him in front, a second came up behind. He was now deeply engaged and soon wounded beyond hope. Two more men were killed, then the great black-bearded man thrust him in the groin with Grayflanks, and he lost blood and bowels. All that he cut away from him. He gave a low cry, "Farewell, my Aud, farewell!" and horribly hurt, dying as he was, threw himself into the press before him. Down the rocks they all fell together, striking the shelf where the two women were, and rolling on to the flat ground. There they lay; and Gisli lay atop. He was still breathing, when Aud came down and knelt by him.

Her grief was respected. The men withdrew apart with their dead. Eight men in all had

been killed. There was no one there that was not hurt.

Eyolf himself presently came near and spoke to Aud.

"Aud," he said, "I bear you no grudge for my broken arm, neither should you bear one against me for your brave dead man. It could not be otherwise. If you will trust me now you shall not regret it." He held out his hand, his left hand; but she turned him a stone-cold face.

"You have covered yourself with infamy, you and your hired murderers. Go your ways and leave me here. I ask only that I may never see you again."

"As you will," he said, and turned away. Presently she saw him go down the rock path to the shore, with some of his party carrying the dead and badly hurt.

The black-bearded man tried her now. "If you will, I will help you bury him," he said. "That will be but just, as it was I that killed him."

"Help us down to the shore with him," Aud

said. He and another man, having covered Gisli with his cloak, carried him down the rocks. On the shore they laid him, and gave him his sword to keep. Then they made a great mound over him of boulders and turf. And there Gisli lay at peace.

"No fight that I ever heard tell of was so great as his," Blackbeard said. "One against fourteen, and six killed outright. I wish I had not been concerned. There is no honour for us in the affair. Well, he will be quiet where he is."

Aud said nothing, and presently she and Gudrid were left alone. She laid her hand upon the cairn, and stood there. Her lips moved, but no sound came. Gudrid was crying freely; but Aud showed no tears.

XXIII

THORDIS VEERS ABOUT

WHEN he had rested himself and had his arm reset, Eyolf took to his ship, and sailed out to Thorsness to see Bork Fat. Bork waited for him on the shore and made him welcome.

"I see that it has cost you something; but I hope you bring me good news," he said.

"Bad is best," said Eyolf. "Nothing in my life has cost me more both in honour, goods and limb. However, the man is dead and buried."

"Now we must see how Thordis takes it," Bork said rather anxiously.

"How then? Was it not she who was so hot against him?"

"Yes, it was. She never loved Gisli, and loved his wife even less. But—with women——!"

"Women indeed," says Eyolf. "I can tell you something about women."

"I think I know enough," Bork said.

Thordis stood up when they entered the house, but did not come down to receive the guest. It was necessary for Bork to go to her.

"Why is he here?" she asked.

"To tell you that he has accomplished your desire."

"To tell me that his hands are red with my brother's blood, do you mean?"

"To tell you that your love for my brother Thorgrim may rest satisfied. For Thorgrim's sake you must be good to Eyolf."

"Let it be enough for Eyolf that I serve him with meat," said Thordis. She was very red, and her blue eyes were hot with tears. She stood there blinking her eyes, crisping and uncrisping her hands. Her large breasts heaved. She was in great distress. Bork, who had expected something of the kind, yet felt a fool.

"Come, my girl, tears will not bring him back." She gave him a furious look, dashed

her hand over her eyes and broke away. They heard her wailing in the Bower.

Eyolf shook his head. "What a woman! And she so hot against Gisli!"

"She is hot against everybody in turn," said Bork. "I shall have a night of it."

At supper-time Thordis came in among her women to serve the table. She herself brought in the roast, and under the dish carried a sheaf of spoons. Setting down the meat she caught sight of a broad flanged spear between Eyolf's knees. She gasped, and as she stooped for the spoons snatched at the weapon and freed it from the table. Before any one could stop her she had lunged with it at Eyolf. He half turned, and saved his life thereby; but the thin keen blade ripped his thigh open. The benches were pushed back, all the men were on their feet, and she disarmed.

She did not attempt to battle any more. A man had either wrist, and she was powerless.

Bork said, "This is an outrage on my kinsman and guest. I do not defend it, I put my-

self at Eyolf's mercy. Let him name the award and I will abide by it."

"But I will not abide by it," Thordis said, straining forward against her captors. She was blind with heat and rage, and knew not what she said.

Eyolf said, "I have had nothing but injury and shame out of this feud. I wish I had never been born. But Bork deals fairly by me, and I will say nothing of outrage. But for the wounding in a friend's house I ask the full worth of a man, and expect it."

"You have it," said Bork. "Now let all be forgotten."

"Not yet," said Thordis. "I call all men to witness." At that call her hands were set free. She took a step nearer.

"I call all men here to witness that I separate myself from this man Bork. I will have no more dealings with him in house or garth, in board or bed. That I owe to my dead brother, and so I pay it."

Bork stretched out his hands. "What is

there to say? Your children, woman—what of them?"

"My son Snorro is mine, and goes with me. Yours you can keep. They are all you will ever have from me."

She left the hall, and kept her word.

That is the tale of Gisli the Outlaw, except what relates to his wife Aud. She with Gudrid her foster child, and Geirmund, Gudrid's brother, joined the family at Hest, where Vestan's widow and her sons still lived. Gest the Wise, who was their kinsman, found them in a ship and crew which took them to Norway. Gudrid and Geirmund settled there, each married and did well. Aud and Gunnhild, the two widows, went presently to Denmark, and received baptism. They say that Aud afterwards went the pilgrimage to Rome, and never came back. The fame of Gisli lived after him in the deeds of Grayflanks the broad-headed spear. In 1221 Gunnlaug had it and killed Biorn Thorwaldsson. In 1238 Sturla Sigvatsson wielded it. But it was worn very thin then, and often he had to tread it out straight with his foot.

THE END

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